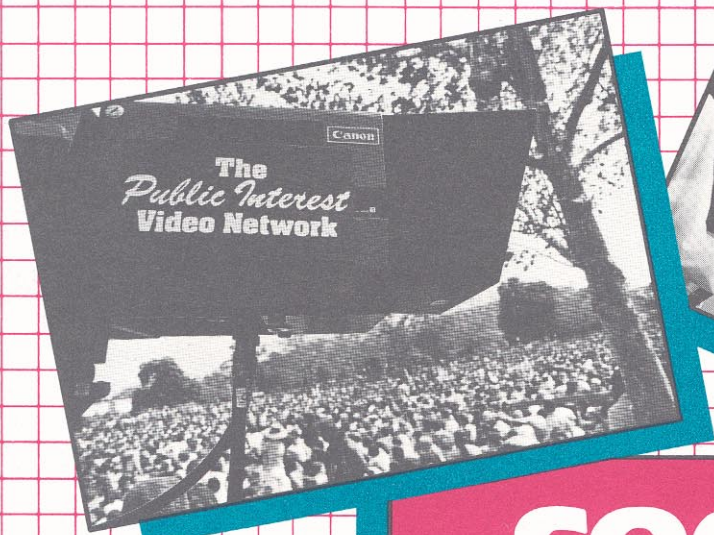


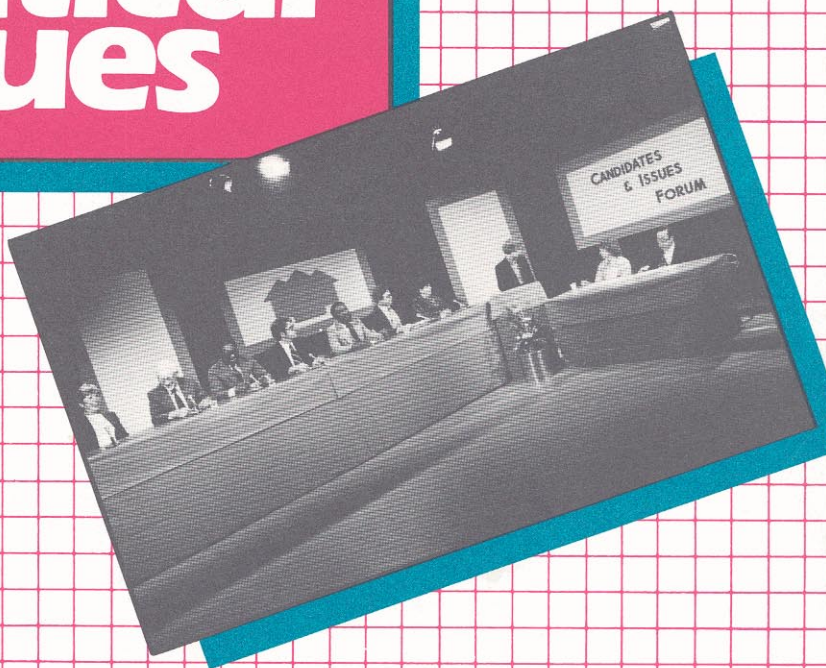
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Community Television Review

Volume 9, No. 1
Spring 1986
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The Community Television Review is published quarterly by the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers. Send subscriptions, memberships, and inquiries to NFLCP, 906 Pennsylvania Ave., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003. Subscriptions come with membership in the NFLCP: Community Associate/Student \$35/year, Professional \$50/year, Patron \$100/year, Non-profit organizations \$90/year, For-profit organizations \$150/year. A subscription can be obtained separately for \$12/year for individuals, \$20/year for libraries, or \$30/year for organizations. *Contents Copyright* © 1986 by the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers, Inc.—Non-profit tax exempt organizations may reprint items from the CTR (with exception of materials copyrighted by others), provided they credit CTR and notify the NFLCP of the reprinting. All others must obtain advance written permission.

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LETTER FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

An extraordinary demonstration of why community television is necessary to fill a serious void in political reporting occurred in Burlington, VT last October. The event was the NFLCP's Northeast Fall Regional Conference, and it featured a reversed press conference. That is, members of the press in Vermont took the podium while politicians and private citizens made comments and asked the reporters difficult, and sometimes hostile questions in relation to their coverage of local, national, and international issues. This unique format produced a thoughtful discussion on the problems between politicians and the media, the complaints that citizens have regarding media coverage of social and political issues, and the severe constraints under which reporters work.

A major concern on the part of elected officials during the two hour exchange was that the media often provide little or no coverage of extremely important issues that were being raised by candidates and elected officials.

Congressman Jim Jeffords (D-VT) said he was disappointed by the media's routine disregard for the subject of his press conferences. He said that he will often hold a press conference on a particular topic, and will then be asked a follow-up question at the end of the conference. The news that night, he said, will often feature his response to that question, but the purpose of the press conference will be ignored.

Burlington Mayor Bernard Saunders related a similar experience: "We had a press conference with the Vermont NEA, the Vermont PTA, and the Rainbow Coalition to discuss the need for tax reform. We were talking about tax reform, education, and municipal services . . . the most important issues facing Vermont. At the end of the press conference I was asked again whether I was going to run for governor. The next day there was not one word on tax reform [in the paper]. It just said, 'Saunders Still Not Sure Whether He's Running For Governor.'"

Brian Burns, the former Lieutenant Governor of Vermont and a major mayoral candidate in Burlington said that while he was running for mayor, he was forced to discontinue his press conferences because the press would never show up. He also said that he was disappointed in the Vermont news media because he felt it did not examine issues in nearly enough detail.

Citizens in the audience also had their chance to confront representatives from the Vermont press. One woman complained that a recent political event featuring all of the women candidates in the state of Vermont was not covered by any press. Another individual criticized the *Burlington Free Press* for censoring letters to the editor. A union member expressed concern that the media did not cover a hearing in which an important union leader was testifying. And an editor of a local paper was asked about a recent headline in his paper which was misleading.

Members of the press responded to this criticism by explaining the constraints that the system imposes upon them. Tom Farmer, the news anchorman for WCAX-TV in Burlington explained that errors are sometimes made because the "news is produced in a madhouse atmosphere where there are always deadlines." Farmer also indicated that each newscast is so short that there is not time to cover everything or go into great detail with respect to those things that are covered. He said, "It is no less painful for me to break down your complex program into 26 seconds, than it is for you to have it broken down. I edit a newscast every night of the week, and every night I throw out things that ought to be on, and

Nick Monsorat, managing editor of the *Rutland Herald*, added that newspaper reporters are on tight deadlines and don't have the luxury to provide the kind of detailed coverage they'd like. He suggested that politicians and active citizens should write their own stories and submit them for publication on the OP ED pages. "The OP ED page of the newspaper is one of the most underused mediums. Do it yourself!" he said.

Monsorat didn't appear to realize it, but he had just hit on the point of the entire exercise: traditional media will not and cannot take full responsibility for facilitating a meaningful exchange of information. We have become dangerously dependent on establishment media, and it is necessary to develop other means by which citizens can formally communicate with their neighbors. In this video age, cable access has become the most important tool for accomplishing this goal. With cable access citizens and political leaders have editorial control over messages which they can transmit directly to the viewers in their community. George Stoney, professor of film and video at New York University, made this point at the end of the session:

"I'd just like to put this discussion in the context of alternative media. At the beginning of this discussion there was a great deal of talk about credibility. And it seems to me the media was defining who is credible and who isn't credible. Fortunately, if we use the media ourselves, we can develop our own credibility. We don't have to depend on you. The second thing is we have the time to give those details.

"I was in Bloomington, IN last week and sat next to the mayor. She said, 'Professor Stoney, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for public access.' She told me she got recognition because she went down to testify at school board hearings. She said, 'I couldn't afford to run for office. I went down to the school hearings, people saw me on access, and I was selected to fill an empty seat on the council.' Then she told me access was now helping her as the mayor. Because the camera is there from beginning to end at city council meetings, the papers are much more careful about selecting the kinds of things they report."

Burlington, VT is in the early stages of developing public access. However, this experience reminds us that communities without public access do not have the tools to fill the critical void that mainstream media is unable. Since most communities are operating without activated public access channels, a great deal of work still remains for access advocates.

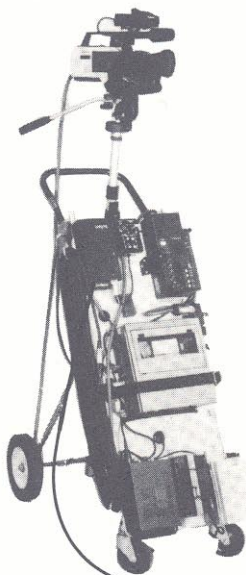
This issue of the *Community Television Review* demonstrates how cable access can provide an important supplement to the information supplied by the media. We will examine the role that access plays in the resolution of important social and political issues. It contains case studies of numerous cable access programs that advocate social change, and articles on how to network such programming. We also give a considerable amount of attention to programs produced by elected officials and political candidates and how local cable channels can be used to cultivate a more informed electorate.

Social and political issues programs are the heart of access. And the experiences explored in this issue serve as a testament to the indispensable role that access plays in a growing number of communities across this country.

Paul D'Ari

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Political Campaigning On Cable TV

By Andy Boehm

Cable is a medium particularly well-suited to advertising all political campaigns, especially local campaigns. This suitability stems from the same reasons many advertising agencies feel cable is *unsuitable* for advertising consumer goods. This seemingly nonsensical proposition can be explained by commercial advertisers' attitudes about television in general.

The advertiser of a typical consumer good like toothpaste highly values broadcast television because it's a mass medium. Broadcasting reaches people of both sexes, all ages, all levels of income and education in almost all places, and all of them brush their teeth. For toothpaste, a medium that reaches everyone is desirable and efficient, despite its high costs. Conversely, the same advertiser rejects cable, despite its low costs, because cable channels have low-audience levels (over 50 percent of American homes are unwired, and those who do subscribe are divided over a couple of dozen channels). When you're selling a product everyone uses, it makes no economic sense to advertise on channels that draw only a small share of the viewing public.

A political campaigner, like a toothpaste manufacturer, sells a commodity; but the political "commodity" is not "consumed" or "purchased" by everybody. Despite the rhetoric of civics teachers and incumbent officeholders, "the people" do not determine who wins elections in America. Only the *voters* make those decisions. Nobody under 18 votes, and except in presidential elections, far fewer than 50 percent of those over 18 bother to vote.

The worst drawback of political advertising on broadcast TV is the unavoidable necessity of paying to reach a "waste audience," people who can't or won't vote in the election you're trying to win. Advertising on specific satellite and local cable channels enables you to minimize the waste audience and maximize the audience that can and probably will vote in the election you're trying to win.

Why? First, the demographic characteristics of typical cable subscribers more

closely approach those of the much desired "habitual voter" than do those of unwired TV viewers. Studies of certain channels show that a high percentage of cable viewers vote, and a significant number donate their time to political campaigns. Second, cable ad sales are tied to specific systems or clusters of systems which are usually enclosed by pre-existing boundaries of political entities like villages, cities, and counties. Candidates running within those boundaries can reach a cable audience lying entirely within their contested districts. Money and effort aren't wasted in reaching people ineligible to participate in the election.

Other advantages to the political use of cable are repetition, spot length, and relative cheapness of advertising and program time. The low price is a reflection of low demand from commercial advertisers, a factor that won't last forever. Cheapness and the habit that local access channels have of repeating debates and forums at different times on different days, means that many more people have the opportunity to watch such cable presentations (compared to a one-shot ad or show on broadcast television). Advertising spots longer than 30 seconds are far more available on cable than on broadcast television. Since the 30-second political spot is increasingly denounced as an insult to voters' intelligences, longer spots (up to two minutes) are especially valuable now.

Most, perhaps all ad-supported, satellite-delivered cable channels, except superstations (which are actually broadcast outlets), offer local cable operators up to two minutes per hour for the insertion of local advertisements. Not all systems are equipped for such insertions, but the number of systems with this capability is growing. Also, many unequipped operators are willing to "manually insert" ads for local candidates. Cable systems will often offer 30-, 60-, 90- or 120-second local avails, enabling candidates to run longer, more substantive ads than almost any broadcast TV station will permit before midnight.

Most satellite networks are "narrowcasters"—they target a specific segment of the overall viewing public. Simple logic

indicates that so-called "news junkies" are people who tend to be more involved in public affairs. Therefore, they are more likely to vote than average citizens. News Junkies, of course, tend to watch the Cable News Network (CNN) which is probably the single best local-avail buy for cable political advertisers. (Of course, C-SPAN would be even better, but it's non-commercial.) Arts & Entertainment (A&E) is good also; it draws the older, well-educated, well-informed, affluent viewers who tend to be habitual voters. CNN provides a better "program environment" for a political ad, but A&E provides a better environment than the escapist fare ("A-Team," etc.) that dominates so much of the broadcast TV schedules.

Campaigns wishing to target traditional voters oriented to "family values" will find local avails on the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) valuable. If your candidate has, or hopes to have, a special appeal to younger voters, try MTV or USA Network's "Night Flight" time block. People in this age range are not reliable voters, but in cities with large universities, the student voters often provide the winning edge in elections. Candidates wishing to bolster their appeal to men can use Lifetime, CBN or The Nashville Network (which, surprisingly, has the highest level of female viewing of all cable networks).

Many systems selling local avails offer a bargain on "roadblocking," an ad on all (ad-selling) channels at about the same time. This is valuable for advertising close to election day, when mass reach finally does become important. This sort of broad reach is usually cheaper than broadcast television (which may not be so broad either), and there's far less ad "clutter" to compete with, which means the cable ads are likely to be remembered longer. Finally, it should be noted that most TV broadcasters severely limit the number of ads they'll sell to political campaigns, a practice the FCC permits so long as it's applied equally to all candidates in the same race. Since most commercial advertisers still tend to shun cable, local system operators

are usually happy to sell any quantity of ads within reason to political campaigners.

Programming By Candidates

Program production for local cable channels presents another important opportunity for political candidates. Although programs advocating the election of a candidate rarely draw large audiences, the people who watch such programming are usually opinion leaders or undecided habitual voters. Both groups are important to the success of any political campaign. A candidate-controlled show can include any of the following formats: a fundraising telethon, a straight speech, a documentary, and a call-in program.

Many access centers permit political programming during a campaign, and candidates can have their programming cablecast (and repeated a number of times) at no cost. In those cases where the access center's rules restrict political programming during a campaign, the candidate can lease time from the cable operator at a low cost.

Local cable programs do not obtain the "accidental audience" that often watch such shows on broadcast TV because the viewers expect a pre-empted, regularly scheduled show. Therefore, cable shows require active promotion to attract viewers. This is best achieved by "piggybacking"—the promotion of a cable presentation in another, more popular medium, or another mode of campaigning. A simple piggybacking technique is to advertise a 30-minute cable *show* in the last ten seconds of a broadcast (radio or TV) *ad*. Since these cable programs can be repeated at little or no cost, a full schedule of showings can be included in a mass-delivered campaign brochure. Also, campaign coffees, dinners, etc., can be scheduled around a cable call-in show guaranteeing an interested, responsive audience.

Other Programming

There are also numerous opportunities for candidates to appear as a guest on local cable programs that are controlled by an independent entity. Such appear-

ances often take the form of debates or candidates forums conducted by the League of Women Voters or similar organizations. Once again, such shows draw few viewers because of non-existent promotion. If your candidate or cause can profit from increased viewership of a debate or forum, promote it. Even exposure controlled by others is usually better than no exposure at all. Sometimes it's better, since it shows skeptics what the candidate can do when required to think and act on his or her feet. Finally, keep a VCR running during such cablecasts. Often, a government access debate provides great raw footage for a subsequent campaign ad.

In conclusion, cable can be a useful, inexpensive way to advertise and promote a political campaign. It usually can't do the entire job, but with proper integration in-

to a media mix, cable can provide an affordable winning edge. And remember, if you've got to plug a media hole (non-existent local radio or a newspaper willfully ignoring your campaign), you can use a VCR and cable TV to create your own news shows or your own video newsletter for volunteers and undecideds. Often this will shame the medium blacking out your campaign, and they may start including coverage of your efforts.

Andy Boehm is a media consultant to political campaigns, cable companies, and commercial advertisers. Since 1971, he has written, produced and scheduled media campaigns for over 85 political campaigns in the Midwest. He can be contacted at the following address: 1431 Morrison, Madison, WI 53703; (608) 255-3076.

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Access Restrictions For Candidates Prevent Electioneering

By Len Tammaro

Election coverage by the major television networks, both before and after the polls close, has become a major public policy issue. Some would argue that there is too much television coverage and that in many cases, the election itself has become secondary.

Politics on cable television, particularly for local elections, is also emerging as a major issue. Many communities with access channels are only now beginning to realize the impact of exposure on local channels. Access to cable channels for candidates and those already in office has never been easier or more affordable.

However, caution should be observed by access coordinators and local origination managers. While the open channel concept of access is truly wonderful and exciting, there still exists the need for carefully structured guidelines and policies so that candidates may use and not abuse the privilege of community access. While you still want to maintain the spirit of access, the rules of fair play dictate that some rules need to be observed, otherwise the access channel becomes another political tool to be used not for community good, but rather for personal gain.

Many communities have already had some brush with politics on community TV. Perhaps you've cablecast debates; or maybe you regularly cover city council or selectmen meetings. Still other communities have run political announcements or programs. Whether you have or haven't, here are some guidelines and examples from Arlington Community Television in Massachusetts.

Let's start with an example. There is a community producer who currently has a show on your access channel. That producer now decides that he or she would like to run for the local board of selectmen or city council. This person, by virtue of the access program, has a decided advantage in terms of exposure before the community who will be voting. Is this an unfair advantage, or do you decide that the program came first so there is no advantage? One could argue that if this producer, who does an access program on home gardening, wants to run for office,

then there is no problem because gardening has nothing to do with politics.

The counter-argument is that it is the high visibility, and not necessarily the content, which gives this candidate an advantage. Visual recognition, the counter-argument suggests, is just as important in politics as it is in product advertising. John or Jane Doe's face can be just as easily recognized as the famed "golden arches," given enough exposure.

Arlington Cable Access, the community television organization which operates through American Cablesystems in Arlington, MA, faced a situation very similar to the scenario described above.

A local state senator representing the district which includes Arlington had proposed to do a program addressing current issues being discussed by the state legislature. The purpose of the program was to keep his constituents informed, and also to indicate how he would vote. The program idea was terrific and really constitutes good "use" of the channel as a community service. What caused some concern was that the state senate election was just about one year away, and this particular senator's re-election bid was certain.

The Arlington Cable Board of Directors and the L.O. Program Director studied the situation (this was the first such "use" of the local channel) and determined that guidelines needed to be drawn up for this and all such future requests. What resulted, to everyone's satisfaction, was a six-month moratorium on the program just prior to the election. It was felt that this would eliminate the advantage (real or imagined) of added TV exposure. This policy was formally adopted and is still practiced.

What was further decided in Arlington was that FCC rules and guidelines would be followed whether or not they legally applied to cable TV. I believe that access centers should adopt, in some form, the Fairness Doctrine and Equal Opportunities Rules for political cablecasting. Each access center needs to look at its own situation and develop policies and guidelines to be used together with the FCC reg-

ulations. Determine first what constitutes a personal appearance or "use" of a cable system by a candidate.

In Arlington, any appearance or announcement by a candidate constitutes a "use" of the system. Opposing candidates are entitled to equal opportunity. The only exceptions to this are when a candidate appears in a newscast, a news documentary, a news interview, or in coverage of a news or community event. If this sounds familiar, it should; it's part of the FCC's equal time for political candidates rules.

Be sure to keep careful records of when such exceptions occur. Also, keep records of all requests for "air" time or studio production time, and the disposition of those requests. It's also a good idea to keep track of programs which contain appearances by candidates, whether or not they fall into your definition of "use" of the system. It's a lot of recordkeeping but it will certainly be useful if questions or problems arise during a campaign. This should apply to all situations whether "air" time was purchased (on L.O. channels) or free (on access channels). Keep track of free time and be sure to offer equal opportunity.

There will be situations where "air" time or studio time will be purchased by someone other than the candidate. If "air" time is purchased, equal opportunity only means that you must allow for the opposing candidates to do the same. They may not, but at least you're covered. On all such programs, however, it is important to begin the program with a statement which identifies the fact that it was paid and produced by a separate entity. In this way, the access organization is divested of political affiliation.

We have also developed rules for a candidate's use of character generated channels. We allow candidates to make announcements on the channel (one each per week). For example, one candidate would offer free rides to the polls; another would provide free spaghetti supper for the senior citizens and such. Actual "Vote for . . . announcements did not constitute

(Continued on page 36)

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Candidates In Austin Enjoy Unrestricted Access

By Paula Manley

It's an election year and the vast majority of Americans will get most of their information about candidates through television ads: slickly-produced spots designed to sell a name and an image in a matter of seconds.

An occasional candidate forum offers a bit more information, although for the most part, commercial television tells us little about those who, when elected, will set policies which directly affect our lives.

In Austin, TX, public access is helping to fill the television information void through providing first-come, first-served availability of channel time and television production training to all Austin citizens, including candidates. Prior to the last city council election, candidates produced and/or appeared on at least 20 public access shows. With a variety of county, state and federal elections set for this year, participation by candidates is certain to continue.

"This is an opportunity for the public to see more candidates, especially in local elections where many candidates can't afford to buy broadcast time," says Melissa Hield, president of Austin Community Television's board of directors. Austin Community Television (ACTV) is a non-profit corporation which manages three public access channels through a contract with the city of Austin.

"We're committed to broad use of the channels," Hield says, "and since scarcity of channel space is not an issue, as it is for broadcasters, we encourage candidates just as we encourage churches, artists, civic organizations and other members of this community."

Without federal restrictions on the use of public access channels by political candidates, the degree to which candidates are encouraged or discouraged is determined at the local level. In Austin, ACTV sends all local candidates a letter informing them of the public access television resources. A recent letter went to nearly 100 candidates including those running for governor, country judge and inspector of hides and animals.

"It's fantastic," says Bill Turpin, a re-

tired Air Force officer who is the host and producer of a conservative public affairs series, *Freedom and Peace*. He is now planning a program with candidates running for U.S. Congress in the 10th Congressional District (which includes Austin).

"The response to having candidates on the channels has been generally favorable," according to ACTV General Manager Marty Newell. "It raises questions, and that allows us to do some community education about the whole notion of what community TV can do and how democracy is supposed to work."

Three years ago, some of the questions about candidates' appearances on the

public access channels came from a member of the Austin Cable Commission who suggested imposing a broadcast-styled "equal time" rule instead of the first-come, first-served approach. The commission, an advisory board to the Austin City Council, voted down the proposal and maintained that all candidates' appearances, including slickly-produced political ads, were allowed under the First Amendment. The city attorney agreed.

Since that time, the number and variety of programs featuring candidates have increased. Candidate forums have been sponsored by organizations, including the Austin Neighborhoods Council, *The*



*"At Home With Pat and Jerry Grigadean:
A Visit With Max Nofziger"*

The program opens with a shot of Pat and Jerry raking leaves in their front yard near a large "Max for Mayor" sign. Pat says, "Last September we invited our friend Max Nofziger over to our house to play some music, visit, and just have some fun." Inside the Grigadeans' home, Max sits cross-legged on the living room floor tuning his guitar. Jerry's single camera pans back and forth between Max and Pat as they talk about the last bond election, solar energy, conservation, and Max's opposition to a proposed coal plant. In closing, it's back to the front yard with Pat and Jerry. "Thanks for coming over," Pat says. "And don't forget to vote!"



**Nina Butts,
Democrat for Congress**

The show begins with applause and a shot of a "Nina Butts, Democrat for Congress" banner. Videotaped on location at a federally-funded housing project, Butts announces her candidacy to the press and a crowd of supporters. In her speech, she criticizes the incumbent for "returning \$6 million in federal star wars contracts to this congressional district and not returning money to improve public housing and feed the hungry." The program includes a series of testimonials from people in the crowd, including a story from an elderly couple: "We had a little group of old people who wanted to act and speak out for nuclear disarmament. . . . Everyone was giving learned discourses, and finally Nina said, 'Let's have a vigil.' At first I thought it was a ghastly idea but I said, 'Well, if that's the way to do it, I'll do it.' I feel very strongly in what she believes in."



**Congressman Tom Loeffler
Candidate for Governor**

**New Athens
With Guest Tom Loeffler**

New Athens is a weekly studio talk show which has featured a number of candidates. During this 30-minute segment, host Gloria Souhami interviews Loeffler about his political experience, campaign spending, and his goal: "bringing the Reagan revolution home." The show, which begins without any introductory sequence or music, alternates between two medium shots: one of the host and one of the guest. "It's a no frills approach," says New Athens producer Dean Langston. During non-election times, guests on the show range from chiropractors to bicycle racers.

Light (a community newspaper which serves Austin's Mexican-American population), and Theatrical Productions (which produced a candidate forum on the arts).

Studio talk shows, field productions, and home-made political "ads" have featured candidates; some of these tapes have included testimonials on their behalf from friends and neighbors, and in one case, members of the candidate's scout troop.

"I'm sure it made a difference in my last campaign," says two-time mayoral candidate Max Nofziger, a renewable energy advocate, musician and flower salesman who last year got 20 percent of the vote in a five-way race. "Using public access television helped broaden my base and add substance to the name ID I have already established," Nofziger says. "Through access, people get more depth than they can with a 30-second commercial; they can get to know the whole person."

Although grassroots candidates with little money, such as Nofziger, were first to take advantage of public access television in Austin, well-financed candidates also participate. On a recent public access talk show, U.S. Congressman Tom Loeffler, a candidate for governor, said his latest financial disclosure statement showed that his campaign had raised \$2.3 million. The amount is more than any non-incumbent running for statewide office has ever raised this far from election day.

Almost all of the shows on Austin's public access channels are produced by community volunteers. "In the public access world, people are not in it for the money," says Dean Langston, producer of a weekly series program which has featured interviews with several candidates. "This has to do with the community looking at ourselves in the mirror," he says.

In Austin, and in other communities where public access television provides a forum for a full range of political speech, we are one step closer to looking in the mirror; to being informed and empowered citizens. We are one step closer to having some measure of community control in the electoral process.

Paula Manley is programming director of Austin Community Television. She can be contacted at ACTV, P.O. Box 1076, Austin, TX 78767; (512) 478-8600.

Cable Access: A Vast, Untapped Resource

By Jeff Bingaman

The idea of using cable access for a televised town meeting came from a discussion I had with Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). He was beginning to use cable systems in New Jersey for town meetings, and he suggested that I look into doing something similar in New Mexico.

New Mexico, unlike New Jersey, is a sparsely populated state, but cable has been available as the primary source of television in most communities since the 1950s. And with these systems already in place, there was a tremendous opportunity for me to communicate with my constituents.

My office contacted Ray Davenport, the executive director of the New Mexico Cable Television Association and Ken Andrews, the former president of the public access operation in Los Alamos. They were both very keen on the idea, and Andrews suggested that we use public access wherever possible.

Using Senator Lautenberg's town meetings as a model, we decided to produce a live, call-in program to be cablecast from a public building that could accommodate an audience. We brought in a non-partisan audience: public officials, business leaders, representatives from the League of Women Voters, and other interested citizens who either wanted to have input or felt they could benefit from such a meeting.

I have completed five of these cable town meetings, and I have found them to be a very effective way to communicate with constituents who might not otherwise be reached. We conducted audience research for our first meeting in Los Alamos, and I was very pleased with the results. According to our survey, the vast majority of the 16,000 cable subscribers in Los Alamos watched this cable access program. We polled every fifth name in the Los Alamos phone book (approximately 5,000 people) and in this sample, over 3,000 Los Alamos residents (more than 60 percent) indicated they watched the program. Part of the reason for this high level of viewership must be attributed to the fact that the event was well publicized and held in the middle of the summer (which is



**U.S. Senator
Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)**

"Local political cablecasting is a vast, untapped resource. It has the unique ability to link the community with its public officials in a way that no other medium can."

a slow time of year in Los Alamos). Nevertheless, the results show that cable access is an important resource that can be used to educate the public on important political issues.

During this process, we have learned a great deal, and my staff has developed a check list, which is printed below. It provides a good indication of how my office plans these events.

- ✓ *Six Weeks Prior To Meeting:* Select the site and conduct preliminary screening of the technical capabilities of the access center and the local cable system.
- ✓ *Four Weeks Prior To Meeting:* Contact and finalize sponsoring organization(s). Obtain a commitment from a local radio station to simulcast the meeting.
- ✓ *Three Weeks Prior To Meeting:* Prepare postal patron mailing to zip codes in the community. Prepare mailing list of local leaders for personal invitations. Finalize technical availabilities and site selection.

- ✓ *Two Weeks Prior To Meeting:* Tape and distribute public service announcements on the meeting for insertion on the cable system and local radio station. Distribute window cards on the meeting and mail personal invitations to community leaders. Arrange to have a Republican official introduce the program.

- ✓ *One Week Prior To Meeting:* Staff will visit the site to make final arrangements and develop a format according to the site's technical capabilities. There must be at least two cameras, two microphones, two telephone lines and one speaker phone. If other equipment is available such as a switcher, videotape machine, audio console, or character generator—check their operating capabilities. Brief the local Republican official (who will be delivering the introduction) on the issues that the senator will focus on in the meeting.

- ✓ *Day Of Meeting:* Staff will attend to last minute technical details and equipment. Brief volunteers from sponsoring organization on the telephone operation, and how to take calls. Brief the senator on the format, the technical operations, and the type of questions he can expect. Prepare a list of credits for individuals and groups who assisted in the program.

- ✓ *Meeting:* Staff members will supervise and trouble-shoot all aspects of the program, and assist production team with any problems that arise.

My community television experiences have ranged from productions within community centers with minimal resources to fully equipped television studios. I have found that technical problems often arise. One of the biggest reoccurring technical problems relates to the telephones. It seems that if something can go wrong with them, it will. We have had bad connections to the speaker telephone, feedback on the line, and crosstalk. However, all the technical problems are usually compensated for by a lot of dedication and hard work by the volunteer crews. I

(Continued on page 29)

A Valuable Link In Constituent Communications

By Tom Tauke

Congressman Lynn Martin breezed into the recording studio, her tousled hair flying. "Am I the last one again?"

As if in answer, Congressmen Steve Gunderson bounded into the studio behind her. "Ta-daah."

"Well, at least I beat you this time, Steve."

"This is amazing," said a third congressman already seated on the set. "We may actually start on time."

"Who's the host this month? I'm not . . . I hope," Martin said as she sat and reached for a lapel mike.

"No, I am," said the third member. "So what should we talk about?"

"Budget, as usual," Martin said.

"Farm programs, as usual," Gunderson said.

"Let's mention tax reform, and perhaps we should say something about the shuttle disaster," said the host.

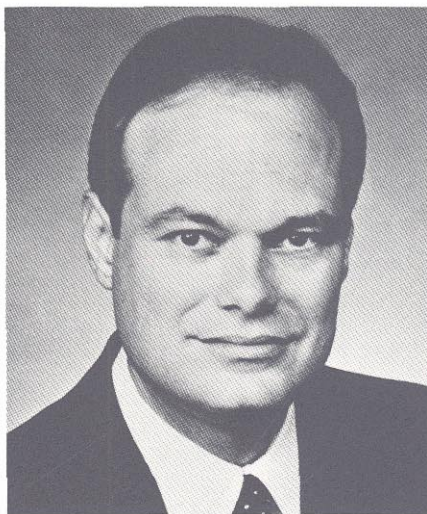
"Ready on the set," came an electronic voice. "Let's have a voice test. Okay. Watch the floor manager for the cue. Five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . ."

"Hello, and welcome to *Washington Report*. I'm your host, Tom Tauke, from Iowa's Second Congressional District, here today with my colleagues Lynn Martin from Illinois and Steve Gunderson from Wisconsin. Together we will discuss issues in congress with particular significance to our tri-state area. Thank you for joining us."

Twenty-eight minutes later, another edition of *Washington Report* is complete. The three members scurry off to their next appointments. That same day, copies of the show are on their way to half a dozen cable systems operating along the Mississippi River in the Iowa-Illinois-Wisconsin region.

Washington Report is typical of shows produced by members of congress and offered to local cable operators back home.

The show is now a regular feature of our plan for communicating with constituents. It could be described as an electronic newsletter, permitting the three participating members of congress to regularly highlight current issues facing the nation's lawmakers.



**U.S. Representative
Tom Tauke (R-IA)**

"Local cable channels provide an excellent vehicle for helping constituents stay informed of developments in Congress."

The cable-viewing audience ranks among the largest that can be reached by a single medium. More than 75,000 subscribers have access to *Washington Report*, a number equalling nearly half the households in Iowa's Second District.

The origins of *Washington Report* date back to 1981. A resourceful cable system in Dubuque, IA, aware of its location at the convergence of three congressional districts, realized that a show featuring the representative from each district could kill three birds with one stone.

The idea was presented to the press secretaries of the members of congress, who recognized the value of such a show. The show has been produced ever since, and its distribution has increased.

The show is produced once a month, but even the modest schedule has proven remarkably difficult to maintain. The scene described above, which took place in January 1986, was the smoothest execution in recent memory and illustrated the exception and not the rule.

First, finding a mutually unscheduled 30 minutes among three members of con-

gress is quite a feat. And that same 30 minutes must also be available in the House Recording Studio where the show is taped.

But even when this is accomplished, the greatest pitfalls often occur on the day scheduled. Odds are about 50/50 that on a given day, the taping will be cancelled, usually only minutes before showtime. Reasons have included an ill-timed vote, a prolonged hearing, unexpected action on legislation, or an emergency meeting called by congressional leaders.

Perhaps that's why the recording studio schedules *Washington Report* in pencil.

Located in the Rayburn House Office Building, the studio contains two standard sets, fully equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. The RCA TK-45 and TK-46 cameras feature Telepromters. Character generators display names and other titles.

Originations are recorded via the one-inch reel-to-reel "C" format broadcast system. The master tape can be reproduced in any combination of color or black-and-white, one-inch reel-to-reel "C" format, two-inch reel-to-reel quadriplex, or three-quarter-inch video cassettes. Half-inch cassettes are available in Beta-max and VHS formats, but three-quarter inch is the standard format offered to cable operators.

So far, the only capability I've found lacking is a countdown, which has been requested by an operator in Iowa.

Washington Report uses a basic "talking head" format, where the three members discuss topics among themselves. Other members spice up their shows with guest stars or by editing in outside footage.

Generally, however, congressmen understand that their shows are not stiff competition for *Wheel of Fortune*. Local cable channels provide an excellent vehicle for helping constituents stay informed of developments in congress, but it takes special dedication by viewers to sit through a discussion of tax reform when they could find much better entertainment on another channel.

(Continued on page 35)

Access Offers A Rare Opportunity

By Barbara Boxer

Public access to cable television has been among my interests since 1972, when I helped establish Marin Community Video (MCV), one of the nation's first public access organizations. In 1973, I produced MCV's first program (a tape examining a recall election for a city council in Marin County). However, in those days MCV was a video collective without access to a local cable channel. Therefore, the tape was shown to community groups on videocassette recorders.

In 1974, MCV obtained a guaranteed time slot of six hours per month from the cable operator, and with a foundation grant, we purchased equipment and began producing *MARINSIGHTS*, a video magazine. We also launched a cable access community awareness campaign directed at local residents, city councils, and the Marin County Board of Supervisors. The county subsequently contracted with MCV to cover their meetings and edit them into a one-half hour program. The series is still running today, and is now called *AGENDA*.

In 1976, I was elected to the Marin County Board of Supervisors, and in my new position, I found *AGENDA* to be extremely useful. Current issues were brought to the attention of citizens who may otherwise have remained unaware that their county government was setting certain priorities or legislative policies which would ultimately effect them.

Local cable channels have been used in my district to cablecast candidates' debates and to provide live election night coverage. However, to a large extent, local cable channels are an untapped resource with tremendous potential to educate citizens during an election campaign. Lack of interest in local races is a big concern in many communities, and in my view, local cable channels offer an ideal opportunity to increase voter interest. I believe that local cable programming can provide more information on candidates' backgrounds, their personalities, and positions on the issues, and this could motivate greater numbers of voters to participate in local elections.

People in my district are interested in a



**U.S. Representative
Barbara Boxer (D-CA)**

"There is a unlimited potential for local cable channels to become the facilitators of community dialogue on issues that people care about."

"behind the scenes" look at key figures in the congress. They have responded very favorably to my monthly interview program, featuring Washington, D.C. policy-makers such as Tony Coelho, George Miller, Pat Schroeder, Ted Weiss, and Nick Mavroules. I tape these half-hour shows while I am in Washington, using the House of Representatives' recording studio, and my district staff distributes the tapes to the local cable systems in my district.

When I am in the district, various community producers invite me to be a guest on their access programs. These programs deal with a wide range of questions and concerns about the federal government. I enjoy doing these shows, because they stimulate public interest in issues which affect all of our lives.

There is unlimited potential for local cable channels to become the facilitators of community dialogue on issues people care about. The democratic process depends on a high level of public participa-

tion to develop a consensus, or (if agreement is impossible) to determine the will of the majority. If people don't have enough information to understand the issues and the choices, they can't really participate in decisionmaking effectively. With so much of the commercial television news and information programming committed to non-local issues, events, and personalities, the local cable channel offers a rare opportunity to cover what is important locally.

For example, polls conducted by the local newspaper in my district show that people think their biggest problem right now is the commuter-traffic congestion on the highway linking Marin and Sonoma counties with San Francisco. A major countywide conference was convened to discuss the problem and outline possible solutions, but it was scheduled for 9:00 a.m. on a weekday, which meant that virtually no commuters could attend. Fortunately, our cable access operator—Marin Community Video—was there to tape the entire session for later playback at a time when the public could watch.

Let's face it. Even in a district like mine, where there are more than two dozen channels to choose from, there are only very limited opportunities for any organization or individual to exercise their First Amendment rights on television. So-called "free speech messages" or public opinion spots are available on commercial channels infrequently, and are usually limited to one-minute slots. Meaningful pursuit of First Amendment goals, call for much, much more. For this reason, the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 contains provisions for public, educational, and governmental access channels, and under the Act, it is the only programming service that can be required by local franchising authorities.

Unfortunately, in my home county of Marin, viewers are about to find themselves victims of the "use it or lose it" syndrome. The county's new cable franchise agreement eliminates one of the two existing local cable channels on the premise that both channels are under-utilized and

(Continued on page 35)

An Important Tool For Public Officials

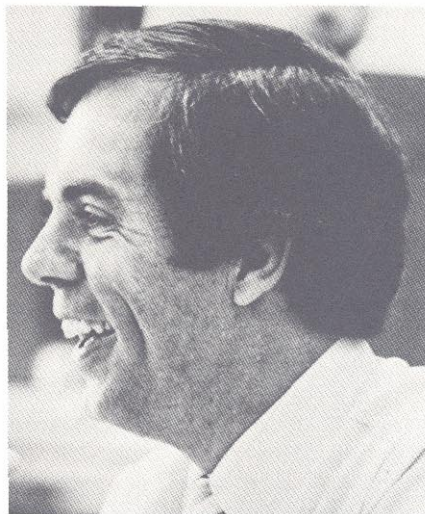
By Tony Coelho

Fifty years ago, politics and technology would never have been considered in the same breath. Now, they coexist, and even thrive on one another. Today, voters get their information from the mass media, and not from the precinct captain who used to help shape their political ideology and tell them how to vote. This fundamental change has not only benefited the electorate who can now actively participate in the political process; it helps politicians, candidates and public officials as well. As a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, I am reminded of this change every day, because I can communicate directly with my constituents through a variety of mediums.

One of those mediums is cable television. For the past year, I have used public access in my central California district to distribute "Congressional Update," my version of "The Tonight Show starring Tony Coelho." Like any new project, it has taken some careful preparation and planning to make it a reality, but it has been worth it. I have long realized that cable television is a growing medium, and as an elected official, it is to my benefit to become a part of it now, not later.

Prior to undertaking the project, I consulted the cable system managers in my district for their advice and support. System managers are always looking for a source of quality local programming, and will always be available for consultation.

My program's format is rather simple. I have a guest during the first segment of the show to discuss a particular topic or issue. I have, for example, hosted Representative William Gray, Chairman of the House Budget Committee, for a discussion on the Gramm-Rudman Balanced Budget Act, and Representative Jack Kemp and I have discussed and debated economic policy. The last segment of the show is the "mailbag," portion of the program, in which I read and respond to constituent mail. People who get their letters answered particularly enjoy this part of the program, and I do too. I like to think that I keep in close contact with my constituents, and this is another way to demonstrate that fact.



**U.S. Representative
Tony Coelho (D-CA)**

"Cable access, with its emphasis on community needs and service, is a valuable tool."

I produce "Congressional Update" on a quarterly basis and most of the cable systems in my district run the show at different times of the day for several weeks. As for the cost, it is rather minimal in my case, because the House Recording Studio rates are relatively inexpensive (the service is provided at cost).

One of the spin-offs of producing my program is that I have also made videotapes available for use by individuals, schools and community groups. There are many events that my schedule just does not allow me to be in the district for, and the videotapes are often a great substitute. And with the boom in VCR sales, it makes sense for elected officials to utilize this medium.

I feel there are many benefits to my involvement with cable television. For one thing, it is a medium in which I can have some control over the message and content. Although I am a strong supporter of a vigorous and active free press, there are times when I like to set the agenda. Many times, the press likes to break down an issue into partisan terms, and although I am part of the House Democratic leader-

ship, and chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, there are many times when I work with, and agree with my Republican colleagues. The legislative process of give-and-take and compromise are sometimes easier to demonstrate without the filter the press sometimes provides. However, I do not look at my cable program as a substitute for press coverage; it is, rather, a part of my overall media strategy.

In the age of television, I feel it is also important that elected officials become familiar with the media. There are some who are critical of the way that television dominates our lives, but good or bad, television is a fact of life in politics today. We do not want, and cannot afford to have public officials who are the talking head "media monsters," like Robert Redford in the film, "The Candidate." but, it does no good for politicians to deny the existence of television. In this video age, political candidates and elected officials must learn to become familiar and comfortable with television. As the unpaid, "executive producer" of "Congressional Update," I must actively think about television. Over the years, I have become comfortable in front of the camera, but to really be effective on television, I think one has to be comfortable "behind" the camera as well.

Public access and local cable programming, although growing in importance, are still an untapped resource for many in politics. Since prices are escalating for using conventional media, the relatively inexpensive costs associated with local cable programming has made this medium a viable alternative. Since an elected official's primary responsibility is to serve and respond to his or her constituents, cable access, with its emphasis on community needs and services, is a valuable tool.

Tony Coelho is a U.S. Congressman from California. For more information, contact: Chris Chiames, c/o Congressman Coelho, 403 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515; (202) 225-6131.

Elected Officials and Government Access

By Andy Beecher

It is well established that the most popular government access service is coverage of city and county government meetings. For this reason, elected officials are often the first to recognize the importance of local cable channels, and many of them are learning to take advantage of the opportunities that these channels offer. Their recognition of the importance of government access has made elected officials a critical community programming ally. However, with this recognition, it has become important to guard against improper use of this valuable resource. Government access operations need to carefully consider procedures for covering the activities of elected officials. Therefore, in this issue, Government Access Corner will examine how government access staff can ensure that in its coverage of public meetings and in its other programming, elected officials will be handled responsibly.

Public Meetings

Public meetings on government access channels are cablecast in basically the same manner in most communities. The technology may differ—some have three, and even four cameras; some may have remote controls on the camera mounts; some have microphones which can be turned on and off by each elected official, while others might have voice activated microphones; some may use color corrected fluorescent lighting, while others have quartz lights; and some wouldn't dream of "going live," while others wouldn't dream of *not* doing so. However, in all cases, the meetings are covered gavel-to-gavel, with no editing, and no journalistic interruptions. In addition, the producers use techniques which are as unobtrusive as possible, and for the most part, the directors do not use close-up reaction shots. Reaction shots are occasionally used when there is a reaction by an individual who is recognized by the chair of the meeting, or when the flow of the meeting contains some rapid "give-and-take" between two speakers. Most producers also use occasional "cover" or "establishing" shots of the whole council, so the coverage doesn't get too claustrophobic.

phobic.

Many producers who cover public proceedings use character generation, not only to identify speakers, but also for including agenda items and other contextual information. These are seen as either "crawls" or "splashes" along the bottom of the screen. Some operations have the city recorder or another official to help "translate" the agenda into easier-to-understand material, and to provide other helpful information, such as this crawl:

"After this consideration by the Council of a request by McDonald's Restaurants to implement a zoning change for a property on Main St., between Oak and Ash, there will be a public hearing on a resolution to change the city's smoking ordinance. . . . The hearing will begin at 8:45 p.m."

This type of display not only assists the faithful viewers of city council, but also serves to lure the casual "channel flipper."

In order to make these meetings more accessible, some government access centers interpret their meetings for the hearing impaired. There are also a number of operations that allow citizens at home to listen to public meetings on their telephones.

A few government access operations have written guidelines on how public proceedings are to be covered. The procedures cover reaction shots, the microphone operation, and permissible alphanumeric displays. However, most centers operate without such formal guidelines. Those centers with rules generally admit to never having to pull them out of the drawer, but feel it is important to have them in case somethings comes up.

An issue that frequently arises when one considers television coverage of public proceedings is political grandstanding. This issue came up recently during the debate over U.S. Senate coverage on C-SPAN. A number of senators and observers who are critical of the idea are convinced that the cameras will increase the frequency of dramatic antics, and will create havoc on the Senate floor. There may be an element of truth in this, but those of us involved in government access

would agree on three things: first, the benefits of citizens viewing an unedited presentation of the government at work in their own homes, easily outweighs the inconvenience caused by an over-acting politician; second, if a politician engages in political grandstanding, the viewing audience will see right through it (although there are some fairly good ex-actors in elected office); and third, the thespian inclinations of an individual lawmaker are as likely to come out, with or without the cameras. (There *are* fellow Senators, a gallery, and the media in attendance.)

The other extreme is the fear among some public officials of being on-camera. This fear has kept some councils from using resources already available to them to televise their meetings. In fact, it may take some time and diligence to convince some elected bodies to let the "video sunshine" in. Kathy Sherman, cable coordinator for the city of Southfield, MI, says that "We asked [the Council's] permission first, and then did 'dry runs' for several months. Then we went back and showed them tapes, and let them decide what looked best . . . what to wear, and the types of lighting to use, etc. . . . and they decided when to go on the cable." Not all groups require such an extended "incubation" process, but it does help to do some preparation.

One fact that I have found helpful is to go to a city which has successfully covered city council meetings, and interview their elected officials (ask them what they think of this coverage). Two years ago, we sent Marc Pease of Tacoma Municipal Television some questions and a blank videocassette, and he returned a very useful recording of responses to our questions from the council and the mayor. Now, when we introduce a council or committee to government access, we use edits of varying lengths of these peer group interviews.

Other Programming

Outside the context of formal public meetings, government cable operations are generally very careful about the types

(Continued on page 38)

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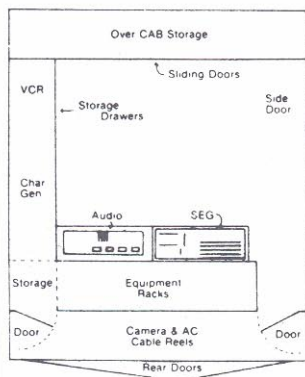


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Cable Access and Social Change: Eight Case Studies

By Barbara Wolf

Carol winked. "Out go the anti-nukes, in come the pro-nukes," she teased as she passed Mary in the doorway. Carol is a member of the John Birch Society; Mary worked with Citizens for Affordable Safe Energy (CASE). They had little in common, and only spoke to each other in public over podiums. Carol was on her way to the editing suite; Mary was on her way out. Mary was not amused. I was. It was one of those sweet and silly moments that come with public access.

Two years later these women would stand on the same side of an issue. They would be joined by more than a hundred friends, enemies, neighbors, and over 80 community organizations, and 13 city governments. They would fight to keep their not-for-profit corporation managing the access resources in Campbell County, KY. Together, they would argue, plead, and reason with the cable company and the CATV board. They would petition the county commissioners. They would lose.

However, by fighting together they demonstrated a firm commitment to public access. And their mutual commitment reaffirms the notion that cable access is of growing importance to social change organizations from all sides of the political spectrum.

What follows is a presentation of eight case studies in which alternative social and political issues programming is produced and cablecast on local channels across the country. The programs examine race relations, environmental issues, trade unionism, women's issues, housing, U.S. foreign policy and nuclear disarmament.

Citizens For Affordable Safe Energy

Mary Reder and CASE (a coalition of 50 churches, labor unions, neighborhood councils and other organizations) fought a long, hard battle to stop the building of a nuclear power plant on the north bank of the Ohio River about 20 miles upstream from Cincinnati. The site is directly across the river from California, KY where Mary lives.

During this long fight, cable access be-

came available in the area, and under Mary's leadership, CASE started using it. The early programs were unedited gavel to gavel coverage of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission hearings. The tapes were played in Cincinnati, Dayton, and Columbus, and in northern Kentucky.

As the controversy reached a critical stage, CASE decided to produce a series of advocacy programs and they hired video artist, Jean Donohue to produce the programs. The first program included an interview with Greg Pallast, an economic consultant for the Environmental Action Foundation. Pallast analyzed the economic implications of building and using a nuclear power plant in the area. He also suggested public ownership of the utility company. Alerted by his appearance on

public access, a local commercial radio station (WKRC) featured Pallast—long-distance from Washington—in a two-hour call-in program.

Several "whistle blowers" who had worked at the plant were also interviewed. Jean said that these interviews were particularly important, not only to the community, but also to the workers, because, she said, their testimonies "had been so political issues programming is produced severely edited in the NRC official records and the local press had ridiculed the men, calling them disgruntled exemployees.

Jean also covered public meetings concerning who would pay for the incomplete power plant. (The gas and electric company wanted to pass the expense on to their customers.) She sent notices to poli-



Gloria Williams from the Iowa City Artists Network tapes a discussion between women who are working on peace issues.

ticians and the press, telling them when the programs would be cablecast. As she packed up after taping the third meeting, three swing vote politicians individually approached Jean to thank her for the notices.

Building was permanently stopped on that plant and costs were not passed on to consumers. Mary doesn't claim that access won the battle. "Eight years of hard work and organizing preceded the use of access. On the other hand, the final vote wasn't unanimous. It was real close."

Know Your Government

Carol Maddox maintains that nuclear power is sensible, clean, and not at all dangerous. She interviews scientists who share her opinion and cablecasts those interviews on her weekly show, *Know Your Government*.

Carol produces some of her shows, but most of the series consists of programs rented or purchased from the John Birch Society, the Eagle Forum, the American Security Council (a private organization), and the Freeman Institute. She wraps these programs with locally produced introductions and conclusions.

One of Carol's main access goals is "to have the local school systems use 'Miracle of America' [the Freeman Institute's video series on the U.S. Constitution] as part of their history/civics curriculum."

Carol's second goal is regional distribution. She has distributed her shows to as many as seven neighboring cable systems, though her show is no longer seen in Louisville because "the cable company ruled that access programs could not exceed 30 minutes in length. My programs generally run 60 minutes," she said.

There is a local contact person in each community that cablecasts *Know Your Government*, and the contact's phone number is seen in the credits at the end of each show. Contact people deliver the tapes to their own cable systems and count their success in phone calls. They get about four a week requesting more information or volunteering help.

Let The People Speak

In Austin, TX, Trella Laughlin measures the success of her shows in death threats: "four death threats is a good show, three is pretty good, two medium, and one is not so hot. You have to have humor if you're going to do this," she says, "because that's the way the Klan and the Nazis work. They try to terrorize people and frighten them from doing prin-

cipled work against them. . . . It's not all death threats, though." Trella is also "continually approached in grocery stores, and on the streets by all kinds of people thanking me for the show."

For the last three years, Trella has hosted a weekly show called *Let the People Speak*. She says she "is not in a group. I'm an independent producer and credentialed journalist. *Let the People Speak* is anti-racist, anti-sexist, pro-human rights." It is basically a talk show, sprinkled with music, slides, and location video footage.

The programs address international issues such as apartheid in South Africa, the death squads in El Salvador, the sanctuary movement ("there is a proposal before the city council that Austin be declared a 'city of refuge'") and Nicaragua (because Texas is both a center for Contra organizing and recruitment for mercenaries to invade Nicaragua).

Mrs. Dorothy Turner, president of the Black Citizens Task Force, is a frequent guest on *Let the People Speak*. In "Stop Killer Cops," Trella and Dorothy asked the city why every six months or so another young black person dies at the hands of the Austin police. According to Trella, the last incident was "the murder of a University of Texas graduate student from Nigeria by four policemen who went to a so-called domestic disturbance at his apartment. The way they subdued him was to throw him down face-first on this waterbed, sit on him and smother him to death." Mrs. Turner has also discussed the everyday issues that face Austin's Black population: job discrimination, housing, education, and the Ku Klux Klan.

"The Klan is very active in Texas," Trella said. "They are more active in Pasadena, which is outside of Houston, but they have a strong, closet Klan here that imports white supremacy programming from Southern California every week, without ever having to produce access, or go to any trouble, or check out equipment, or use the studio or anything."

Race and Reason

Tom Metzger, former California Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, ships "Race and Reason" to Austin and 14 other access centers around the country. Tom advertises his program in the newspaper "WAR" (White American Resistance), a publication of the White American Political Association.

He explained that associates of his organization make it a local level project to show his programs in their communities.

"We usually get flack initially," he said, "but after some negotiation there is usually no problem. . . . We do have to take along someone who is knowledgeable of the law to talk to the cable companies in as nice terms as we can. Sometimes that solves the problem."

In Tom's words, his program is "basically a white racist TV show." He has been an access producer for a year, introducing each of his 28 shows with, "Welcome, I'm your host on *Race and Reason*. *Race and Reason* is dedicated to freedom of speech, that small island of free speech in the sea of controlled and managed news." According to Tom, what follows is a "healthy debate and discussion" between Tom, his co-host, and their guest for the evening. The program is unedited and unadorned with other visual material.

Tom describes these guests as having "racial views ranging from right to left, and sometimes in the middle. We try to spread it out," he says, "and get quite a few views in. . . . When we talk about race—many times we have a black or a person of another race on—we agree on so many more issues than we disagree on that it becomes uncomfortable for what we call the elitists in our society." Tom says elitists are "phony humanitarians."

Tom Metzger likes protests against his show. "They get on their shows and talk about how terrible our show is. . . . That's good advertisement. They say, 'This is a horrible, heinous, terrible show.' You know how people are that's the show they want to see."

And he likes access. "We wanted to get our ideas across to the public and felt that cable access is the greatest vehicle, because you don't get real freedom of speech on commercial TV. In fact, many of the things I'd like to say, I could not even buy time for on commercial TV."

He also encourages people to become access producers, "We've told people who didn't like our show, 'that's fine, get your own show.' I find the big problem with cable access is that not enough people know about it, not enough people understand it, and not enough people are using it."

Tom receives an average of 12 letters a week from viewers. He said, most are "working class letters agreeing that white working people definitely do not have it made unlike what other media try to lead people to believe." A few letters say, "You're a no good rat. I wish they'd hang you." Tom finds he gets more replies

from places where access schedules are printed in the local newspaper.

Something's Happening Here

To build her audience, Gloria Williams and her crew used to hand out business cards printed with their show title—"Something's Happening Here"—and its cablecast times. They handed these cards out while they took polls on the streets of Iowa City, IA. The polls were a regular part of the series. Each program also included five-minute interviews, films, music, and video art.

The eight shows in this series have a definite feminist orientation, but address a wide range of political issues. Guests on the shows have included representatives from the Emma Goldman Clinic (a self-help women's clinic); members of the African Student Association (they were concerned about apartheid in South Africa); leaders of the Fair Rent Campaign (advocates of rent control); a woman who does counselling for incest victims; representatives from Independent Living (an advocacy group for the handicapped); Otura Ravello, nephew of the then president of El Salvador (he was working to overthrow the oligarchy his uncle served); the organizer of People for Economic Justice (an organization that lobbies for changes in the social service system); a former member of Hari Krishna; and members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The polls sometimes reflected and commented on the interviews. The question, "who is the president of El Salvador?" prompted the following answers: "I don't know," "I don't know," "I don't know," "I should know, but I don't know," and "It's a long name, that's all I know."

"Something's Happening Here" was intended to be entertaining as well as informative. It succeeded. Gloria and her crew won four awards at a local community programming awards banquet.

Sceptre of Violence

Sceptre of Violence won the U.S. Industrial Film Festival's Silver Screen Award in 1981. According to Clayton Roberts, vice president—public relations for the National Right to Work Committee (NRWC), the NRWC produced this documentary on union violence to effect the passage of legislation reversing a "1973 Supreme Court decision exempting union officials and their agents from federal prosecution for violence committed in pursuit of, quote, legitimate union objectives. It is a story told through the eyes of

victims of union violence, people who have been beaten, sexually harassed, and otherwise threatened and intimidated by union hierarchy."

In 1983, NRWC offered "*Sceptre of Violence*" to cable outlets across the nation via satellite. "Several hundred picked it up," Clayton explains. "The program invites viewers to call or write their representatives in congress and call or write the National Right to Work Committee. There was a tremendous response on both counts." Because of its success, the film was shown nationwide, again by satellite, on March 18, 1986.

NRWC often mails brochures to all parts of the country inviting schools and civic organizations to use this and other NRWC productions. Clayton reports there is a steady flow of requests for the film.

He said the film was financed by donations from the Committee's 1.7 million members and contributions from several corporations. The program was produced by a professional crew. Without the figures in front of him, Clayton could only say the film cost "a lot of money."

Second Line

Lance Hill and his crew recently received a Municipal Endowment Grant—money set aside from franchise fees—to produce a weekly program entitled, *Second Line*. Lance explained that *Second Line* refers to "a self-organized assemblage of revelers" who take over where the official Mardi Gras parade leaves off; "it's a kind of organized disorganization," he said.

Each segment of "*Second Line*" includes "a critique of the news, analyzing news as a cultural product, rather than a reflection of reality. The rest of the program features video projects other people are doing." *Second Line* encourages outside producers to take on a particular issue and follow it week by week. The idea, Lance said, is to make the show available to "people who want to do some kind of production, but don't want to do a regular program. Those people can come up with a shorter video and fit it into our format. We can showcase it, advertise it ahead of time, and share our audiences."

Last year, Lance produced "*From Capetown to Uptown: the New Orleans Apartheid Connection*," a documentary detailing the conditions of Blacks in South Africa within the context of the importation of \$200 million worth of South African uranium through New Orleans ports.

The show ran on 20 consecutive Monday nights. Each time, Lance's phone number was tagged to the end of the show. He said, "every Monday night for those 20 weeks at 9:27 p.m. the phone would ring off the hook. Ninety-five percent of the calls were favorable. The few that were guarded wanted transcripts. People said they watched it because they recognized that it was based in New Orleans. Almost all shots were in places that were easily identified."

Lance laments that "most political organizations haven't grasped the potential of video in their political work, they spend a couple of hundred dollars printing 2,000 leaflets instead of putting it into a video production that will reach a lot more people. We are trying to integrate the video experience into organizing practice. So if people want to make the leap from sitting in front of their TV sets to going out in the streets, they have the mechanism to do that."

Somerville, MA

Claire Beach has not only grasped that potential, she has thrown it to the ground and hog-tied it. Somerville, MA was wired for cable in 1972, and according to Claire, "our programs have ranged from gavel to gavel coverage of meetings, to elaborately produced documentaries. We have had time to learn what works well."

She said, "there was an election between a very popular incumbent who was on trial for corruption [during the election] and an opponent who was an advocate for social change. The trial transcripts had been published in the newspaper. Since little attention had been paid to the paper accounts, we dramatized the transcripts with actors the night before the election. The incumbent lost." Claire made that show as an independent producer.

In her role as the video coordinator of the Elizabeth Peabody House (a multi-service center and settlement house), Claire trained pre-teens to use video equipment in 1976. At that time, there was a controversy relating to the hill of slate and granite (known as the mountain) between the Mystic Public Housing Development and the elementary school. For years, the community had been asking for a staircase between the school and the housing development, because children were falling daily. There were bruises, broken bones and one child died. Between 1976 to 1982 the children who were trained by Claire Beach produced videos about

the hill. On those tapes, children asked the mayor when he was going to put steps in for them. Public officials were taped responding to the issue and parents were interviewed. Documentaries were made with titles like *Mountain of Trouble* and *Stairway to Heaven*.

"Our work not only got a staircase here, but it broke open a scandal. Someone called after one show to say, 'You know that \$30,000 was given by the Federal Government in 1970 for the staircase.' So for ten years there had been money allocated that had been absconded with. Several people went to jail. I will always believe, and I think most people believe, that we won because of the coverage these young people gave the issue."

Clair is currently working on a show that will document the role that video and cable access played in the process.

* * * * *

After the unsuccessful battle to keep their community-controlled, non-profit access corporation in Campbell County, KY, Mary Reder volunteered to represent angry and concerned access producers at a CATV Board meeting with the company present. Ironically, both the company and

the CATV Board discounted Mary's testimony because she lives in a section of the community that is not yet wired for cable.

Mary volunteered because she understands something the cable company and the CATV Board do not. Like Carol Maddox, Trella Laughlin, Gloria Williams, Tom Metzger, Clayton Roberts, Lance Hill, Claire Beach, and countless others around the country, Mary Reder knows public access is not just about seeing; public access is about speaking.

Barbara Wolf, formerly the executive director of Four Cs Access in Campbell County, KY, is a video producer in Cincinnati. She can be contacted at the following address: 179 Pomona Court, Cincinnati, OH 45206; (513) 861-2462.

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After The Act—This 30-minute program examines the impact of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984. It includes interviews with Sue Miller Buske, executive director of NFLCP, Joe Van Eaton, with the law firm of Speigel and McDiarmid; Michael Meyerson, associate professor at the University of Baltimore; Nick Miller, with the law firm of Miller and Young; and George Stoney, professor of film and video at New York University.
Purchase: \$100.00 Seven-day rental: \$40.00

GRTV Celebrates Peace Day

By Dirk Koning

GRTV, the public access operation in Grand Rapids, MI, presented 24 hours of peace programming on August 6, 1985—40 years after the bombing of Hiroshima. The purpose of the event was to remember the devastating effects of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and to celebrate the last 40 years in which no nuclear weapons have taken human lives.

This 24-hour programming event was managed by three producers who guided a volunteer group of 50 through 40 tape roll-ins and over 30 live acts. Local bands, family groups, public officials, poets, artists, and veterans provided the talent.

GRTV opened its programming on peace day with a minute of silence at 8:12 a.m., followed by two minutes of bells ringing from a nearby church. The subsequent programming that morning included: the fire chief discussing the civil defense evacuation plans for Grand Rapids; a group of third grade students defining what peace means to them; a group of veterans discussing their memories; and a peace activist quantifying our nuclear arsenal with B B gun pellets.

The next few hours featured songs, poetry, peace preachers, and Japanese native Hitome Sano demonstrating origami and paper construction. GRTV also cablecast footage of local activists wrapping the Federal Building in Grand Rapids with peace ribbons.

Late that afternoon, there was a locally produced documentary on "Great Writers On Peace" and an in-studio panel discussed "Parenting For Peace and Justice."

At 7 p.m. (almost 12 hours into the shoot) home viewers and a live studio audience were treated to a lively discussion on "Peace Education." The program featured a "Donahue style" discussion with the studio audience; there were also calls from the viewers at home. "Peace and Education" was followed by a presentation of local health experts discussing the physical and psychological effects of nuclear war.

At midnight, "Reggae for Peace" bands rocked the studio as a local impromptu theater group worked on a section of the library basement (an actual fallout shelter)

to have it resemble an activated shelter. For two and one-half hours the group went live, simulating the first 24 hours in a shelter after the bomb hit. With an erie sense of realism they struggled to decide what to do with the dead and dying, and their own bodies excretions.

At 6:00 a.m. the next morning, the haggard Peace Day survivors joined hands in

a circle and sang John Lennon's "Give Peace A Chance."

Dirk Koning is executive director of GRTV. He can be contacted at the following address: GRTV, 50 Library Plaza NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503; (616) 459-4788.

GRTV PEACE DAY HIGHLIGHTS

Lest We Forget—A Salute to Veterans—This locally produced music video placed poignant pictures from old *Life* magazine shots of war scenes over Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine anthems.

Interview with Paul Milanowski—A Local catholic priest had decided to leave America in protest of military policy. We were able to land the last interview with him discussing his unusual decision and the philosophy behind it.

Peace Posters—Jefferson School—Local students had a six-week project to draw what peace meant to them. GRTV aired the posters and asked different students to explain them.

Educators for Social Responsibility—Great Writers On Peace—The Educators for Social Responsibility produced a tape focusing on peace prose and the events that may have influenced these writers.

Vietnam Veterans Association—Chapter 18—In one of the most emotionally charged events of the 24 hours, two local Vietnam veterans blasted the efforts of the Peace Ribbon marchers and their lack of understanding for those who willingly defended their country.

Video From Russia, The People Speak—This hour program featured Russians on a Moscow street telling us what they thought of the arms race and the American People.

Peace Education Discussion—This live debate in the studio between a local defense department spokesman and a minister from an non-denominational church. They debated the approach schools should take in discussing the arms issue with students.

Access Provides A Forum For Discussions On National Issues

By Bruce Adams

The National Issues Forum, as Ann Sheehan and Randy Ammon have explained in the accompanying article (see page 24), is an effort to get neighbors talking with neighbors about major national issues. The model is the classic New England town meeting. The motivation behind the National Issues Forum is based on a major concern that our nation is drifting away from the fundamental values of a democratic process. The irony is that in our fast-paced information age, we do not have the kind of information we need to build consensus about what we want for the future of our country. There are numbers and facts everywhere but precious little wisdom. We have libraries full of polling data that reveal the people's knee jerk reactions, but we know very little about what people would think if they took the time to learn more about an issue and talk with their neighbors about it.

The National Issues Forum gives citizens a chance to inform themselves on current topics, discuss realistic policy options, and share their informed opinions with policymakers. The forums are locally organized and funded, and they are non-partisan. National Issues Forums are organized by libraries, senior centers, continuing education programs, labor unions, churches, corporations, and community television programmers. Communities participating in the NIF each fall have grown from 25 in 1982 to 200 today. NIF is successful because it provides:

- a better way for citizens to inform themselves about national issues;
- a better way for citizens to involve themselves in public choices; and
- a better way for citizens to communicate with their leaders.

In a nation which is often fragmented, NIF is a way to rediscover common ground.

Televising National Issues Forums

In the summer of 1982, supporters of the National Issues Forum considered the possibility of using television to reach beyond the traditional audiences that attend

community forums. But traditional television eschews presenting programs featuring audience participation in discussions on national issues. Therefore, we went to Berks Community Television in Reading, PA, an organization with a national reputation for facilitating citizen discussion on local issues. BCTV, as it turned out, was looking for what we had—background materials to facilitate community cable forums on national issues. It was a perfect partnership to promote community learning.

BCTV agreed to do nine one hour forums in 1983. Mary Dawn Bailey, an NIF organizer in Charlotte, NC, visited Reading that fall and returned home to convince her cable operator to use the BCTV model to cablecast live forums with call-ins from viewers at home. The Charlotte experience showed that the Reading success could be replicated elsewhere. Cablevision of Charlotte had never done a live call-in show before the National Issues Forums in 1983, but it is now doing them on a regular basis on local issues. In addition to Reading and Charlotte, Warner Amex Cable in Dallas taped a forum and gave viewers the opportunity to express their opinions using the QUBE system.

BCTV won a Hometown USA Award for its NIF series, and the use of television to expand the NIF audience spread rapidly. In the fall of 1984, there were 74 televised national issues forums in 17 cities. A majority of the forums were televised by cable access television. In Grand Rapids, MI, a commercial station also taped one forum and used edited versions as a part of two Sunday magazine shows. In Charlotte, public television covered three live forums and allowed home viewers to express opinions and ask questions. Cable access organizations teamed up with already existing NIF convenors in most cities, but in Cupertino, CA, Mamaroneck, NY, and Pocatello, ID, cable access took the lead in organizing the NIF (just as it had in Reading in 1983).

Preliminary figures from the fall/winter 1985 forums indicate continued activity. Over 50 forums were televised in 15 cities.

In Grand Rapids, MI, Dayton, OH and Omaha, NE, commercial television aired the NIF, and in Charlotte, NC and El Paso, TX, public television was the major vehicle. However, the majority of televised NIFs were once again on cable access.

What Have We Learned?

Cable access operations that have cablecast national issues forums report valuable increased community exposure. The National Issues Forum provides cable access organizations with high quality community programming on subjects of broad public interest. The NIF helps cable access fulfill its responsibility as community educators, and NIF local organizers and citizens interested in the NIF issues broaden the base of support and viewers for community television.

National, state, and local officials pay attention to these forums. In Tucson, AZ, for example, U.S. Senator Dennis DeConcini has become a major supporter of having NIF cablecast. Being part of a national network has led to excellent press coverage for Berks Community Television. In fact, a chilly relationship with the local newspaper has been turned into a supportive one because of a shared commitment to the NIF process.

National Issues Forum organizers who have experimented with television cite three main advantages. First, television exposes a greater number of people to the NIF process than traditional local forums. By lowering the cost of participation (it is easier to turn on a television than to go out to a meeting), cable expands the pool of possible participants. Second, by adding excitement and prestige, television makes it easier to recruit moderators, resource panelists, and forum participants. Third, television creates a permanent record of the forums.

We have found cable access a supportive environment in which to work. Local convenors attempting to explain the NIF process of people talking to people found immediate understanding from access staff, compared to the staff of commercial

(Continued on page 38)

National Issues Forum: The Reading and Pocatello Experiences

By Ann Sheehan and Randal L. Ammon

"The federal deficit *does* concern me," explained high school student Paul Dodge. "But the fact that we've spent three weeks talking about this as a local community in Berks County, PA, and that they're discussing this all over the United States as a *national* issue, gives me a lot of reasons for optimism. I think it'll come to the point where we'll deal with the problem as a democratic society."

Each fall, citizens in 200 communities around the country discuss three public issues of outstanding national concern. Like the town hall meetings in the earliest days of American history, the forums give people a chance to speak their minds and work toward common understandings. Known as the National Issues Forum (NIF), the discussions are staged by local groups that make up the Domestic Policy Association (DPA). In about 15 of these communities, the walls of the meeting halls are expanded through television to include people unable to attend the live forums. And in a number of these communities, home viewers are able to participate in the discussions by telephone.

The first of the National Issues Forums took place in the fall of 1982. In the summer of 1983, Berks Community Television (BCTV) agreed to take the lead in organizing the NIF in the Reading, PA area. Forums were also televised in Charlotte, NC and Dallas, TX. Pocatello-Vision 12, Idaho's first public access channel, joined a number of other access organizations around the country in cablecasting forums during the fall of 1984.

Participation in the National Issues Forum has been a great success for our community television operations. We have both won awards in NFLCP's Hometown USA Video Festival for our forums—BCTV in 1984 and Pocatello-Vision 12 in 1985. We especially admire the fact that the National Issues Forum is a non-partisan operation dedicated to the concept that an informed citizenry is the key to a working democracy.

These open town hall meetings fit perfectly with the concept of community access television. They empower people with a sense of worth by giving them oppor-

tunities to talk through the issues with their neighbors, knowing that their thoughts will reach policymakers who can make changes in the system.

To encourage informed citizen discussion of important national issues, a wealth of information and resource materials is available for National Issues Forum participants. Balanced and concise issue books are available at a reasonable cost, as are issue summaries, discussion guides, and videotapes.

The Reading Experience

For the last decade, BCTV has provided a forum for the citizens of Reading in Berks County, PA, to meet their elected officials and exchange information with their fellow citizens. The use of split-screen technology with home viewer participation, facilitates these town meetings. BCTV, a non-profit community organization, currently cablecasts a minimum of 16 hours each week of live programming on a variety of topics.

In the summer of 1983, BCTV staff and volunteers met with National Issues Forum organizers to discuss the possibility of cablecasting live forums. BCTV decided to do three 60-minute, live interactive programs on each of the three 1983 issues: education, nuclear arms, and the federal budget deficit. BCTV Board President and former Reading Mayor Eugene L. Shirk served as moderator. Each program was cablecast live on Thursday evenings and taped for later replay. In addition to BCTV's downtown Reading studio, county school district studios served as sites for public participation in the live programs. For example, for the three-week series on education, three sites were open to the public: BCTV's studio and a rural as well as suburban school. Through the use of split-screen technology, people at the three sites were able to communicate. And home viewers were able to phone in and express their opinions as well. The 1983 NIF series in Reading began in October and ended in December. Approximately 200 people participated in the nine live forums, and almost 60 viewers called in with their comments or questions.

The schools that regularly participate in the ongoing Friday morning BCTV program "Bridging the Generation Gap" decided to use the forum issues as the topics for their weekly discussions with area senior citizens during the fall semester.

The *Reading Eagle-Times* agreed to publicize the BCTV National Issues Forum series and to print in full the three NIF issue books. In addition, BCTV ran NIF public service announcements, promoting the series before it began. Letters and phone calls were made to local groups and interested individuals.

One of the most attractive points about the National Issues Forum is that the results of the discussions across the country each fall are reported to the nation's top policymakers. Each spring, there is a conference at one of the presidential libraries. It brings national policymakers and NIF participants together to discuss the issues. In the spring of 1984, Gene Shirk was one of 18 citizens picked to participate at the Lyndon Johnson conference. Shirk was on a panel with such national luminaries as Henry Kissinger and Robert McNamara. A "Washington Week" gives NIF participants a chance to tell members of congress, White House staff, and other opinion leaders about the forum discussions.

BCTV's commitment to the National Issues Forum has continued and grown since 1983. The NIF series is now regularly scheduled for the fall of each year, and the length of the programs has been extended from 60 to 90 minutes. In addition, study circles have been created in order to facilitate more meaningful discussions. In 1985, groups of individuals met either before or after live BCTV forums in private homes, senior centers, and nutrition sites to discuss taxes, welfare, and U.S.-Soviet relations. Study circles selected a moderator and designated a representative to report their views during the live BCTV forums. The study circle concept allows for greater flexibility for busy people, broadens the conversation, and adds to the quality of participation during the cablecast forums.

The newspaper continues to play an important role in publicizing the NIF series. It no longer publishes the entire issue books, but it does carry issue summaries, writes editorials that encourage participation, and publishes articles about BCTV and the NIF each fall.

One of the great benefits for BCTV has been the involvement of new groups and individuals. For example, following the 1984 forums on the environment, someone who had previously shied away from television decided to put together a monthly program on local environmental issues. In 1985, because of the interest of area high schools in the U.S.-Soviet issue, BCTV did four live programs (five area United Nations clubs participated in the program). One of the clubs is in a high school that is not part of the cable system, but the students were so interested that they went to a suburban school with cable every Thursday night for four weeks so that they could participate.

The Pocatello Experience

Pocatello-Vision 12 first learned about the National Issues Forum in the summer of 1984 at the NFLCP conference in Denver. That fall, the access channel launched its first NIF series as an experiment, with a two-person staff, a shoestring budget and only a limited amount of experience with live call-in programs. The League of Women Voters co-sponsored the series, and with a little money, basic equipment (Radio Shack speakerphones), support materials on the NIF, and the hard work of a volunteer steering committee and staff, several 90-minute forums on each of the three topics—health care costs, environmental protection, and jobs—were produced during November and December of 1984. The quality of our moderator and panelists coupled with lively telephone interaction resulted in some first-rate community programming.

Several changes were made during the second season of NIF. The forum day was switched to avoid competition with a live call-in program on the Pocatello PBS station, and the forum location was moved from the Pocatello-Vision 12 studio to the

larger and more familiar city council chambers.

Another effective innovation during the second season was the use of person-in-the-street interviews for local trigger tapes to complement the 12-minute starter tapes produced on each issue by NIF. During the week before each forum, between 10 and 20 people were interviewed in shopping centers. The interviews were edited into a concise presentation. This was a way to involve people who probably would not have attended or phoned-in. Many of those interviewed tuned in to watch the televised forums. Also, the process of setting up a camera in a public place generates publicity. Informational flyers were distributed while the interviews were being taped.

In 1985, previews for each forum were frequently cablecast on the access channel. Trigger tapes—video versions of the NIF issue books—were also run to generate publicity.

A great deal of thought and effort by our steering committee went into the selection of resource people. An ideal resource panel consisted of three or four experts from diverse backgrounds, representing different sides of the issues. The forums were not designed to be debates among these experts. The purpose of the panel was to provide information, answer questions, and keep the discussion flowing if participants were silent.

An interesting resource panel was selected for our October forum on "Welfare: Who Should Be Entitled to Public Help?" Panelists included two professionals—a social worker with the State Department of Health and Welfare and a counselor for Idaho State University—and two private citizens with opposing viewpoints who had been debating the issue through recent letters to the editor in the local newspaper.

The fact that these forums were much more than panel discussions was most clearly demonstrated at the November town meeting on "Taxes: Who Should Pay and Why?" Our well balanced four person resource panel disintegrated with three last minute cancellations; and a

fourth panelist had to leave for another speaking engagement halfway through. However, discussion by the live audience and viewers at home kept the forum going strong for an hour and forty-five minutes. In fact, every one of the 1985 issues forums in Pocatello required an extension beyond the scheduled 90 minutes, due to unexpected high levels of interaction. Total participation in 1985 averaged over 50 people per forum, a dramatic increase over the first season.

People Talking To People

Planning the National Issues Forum takes a great deal of time and effort. But for those who believe that our democratic system is based on people talking to people, it is well worth the effort. BCTV Board President Eugene Shirk explains: "It takes a lot of time, but I think we have an obligation to be part of the political process, and NIF is a great way to do it."

Because the National Issues Forum concerns issues on the national level, and because it ultimately involves national policymakers, it goes a long way in dispelling feelings of citizen apathy and powerlessness. An added benefit of involvement with the NIF is that it brings diverse segments of the community together, and it helps broaden community awareness of community television.

The National Issues Forum and community television are made for each other. The NIF town hall meeting format is the essence of access and of democracy. And it provides some darn good community television.

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Alternative Views Has An Impact

By Frank Murrow

During the last eight years, *Alternative Views*, one of the oldest social issues programs on public access television, has featured over 280 weekly, one-hour shows. Based in Austin, TX, this unique, progressive public affairs program is shown in approximately 35 cities, reaching over 2,500,000 households.

The program features a 15- to 20-minute national and international news segment, followed by an in-depth examination of one or more issues. Over the years, *Alternative Views* has covered the following issues: corporate control of the economy, government and mass media, civil liberties, the energy crisis, alternative energy sources and environmental problems, poverty and inequality of wealth and power, rape and violence toward women, racism, and U.S. foreign policy.

Our guests have included physician and anti-nuclear activist Helen Caldicott; former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark; peace activist Daniel Ellsberg; Hollywood film director Edward Dmytryk; civil rights lawyer William Kunstler; American Indian activist Russell Means; former CIA official John Stockwell; Nobel Prize Winning Biologist George Wald; civil rights activists Stokely Carmichael; and Dr. Benjamin Spock.

Other lesser known guests have related their poignant—and sometimes painful—personal experiences. These guests include a *Texas Monthly* reporter who spent several months in the mountains with Mexican guerrillas; former political prisoners from Chile, Iran, and Argentina who were arrested and tortured; survivors of the Nagasaki bombing; travellers returning (with pictures) from Cuba, Vietnam, El Salvador, Jamaica, Grenada, Nicaragua, Iran, and South Africa.

Alternative Views also focuses on local issues in Austin. Over 100 local groups have been guests on the program. Our local coverage has included an anti-Ku Klux Klan rally, student resistance to University of Texas efforts to tear down family housing, an anti-nuclear rally, local draft registration resistance, and citizen action against land development in Austin.

Alternative Views has received a tremendous response from viewers in Austin. Many programs have been replayed at the request of our audience, and numerous requests have been received for transcripts for a particular show. Participants in the program have reported many letters and phone calls. They have also been stopped on the streets by individuals who saw them on *Alternative Views*. The following are some examples:

- A nutritionist received 50 phone calls over a three week period in response to her appearance on the program.
- An alternative political newspaper received 15 new subscriptions after the editors were on the program.
- A presentation on urban problems in Austin and in the county was recorded by city officials and circulated among the staff.
- One guest commented that he has been

besieged with phone calls and has been stopped frequently on the streets by total strangers who have complimented him on his appearance on *Alternative Views*.

Alternative Views has been effective in other ways as well. For example, some school teachers and college professors require their students to watch the program, and in some cases, students have been asked to make presentations to their class on a particular program. In one sixth grade class, the teacher arranged to have Austin Community Community Television (ACTV) cablecast two *Alternative Views* programs at special times so her class could watch the program, and on the day after the cablecast, the class had a long discussion with a producer of *Alternative Views*. In addition, some of our programs are in the University of Texas Library, and professors occasionally use them in their classes.



Two frequent guests on *ALTERNATIVE VIEWS* are American Atheist founder Madalyn Murray O'Hare and Texas folklorist John Henry Faulk. The two are shown at a fundraiser for *ALTERNATIVE VIEWS*.

Alternative Views has also gained a considerable amount of press attention. The program outraged conservative political columnist William F. Buckley so much (he saw *Alternative Views* while he was in Austin) that he wrote a column on *Alternative Views*, stating that it was an example of moral rot in the United States. *Alternative Views* has also been covered in *USA Today*, the *Austin Chronicle*, *The Progressive*, *In These Times*, *Emmy*, and *ACCESS*.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of *Alternative Views* is that it is being networked around the country to other access operations. In addition to Austin, *Alternative Views* is shown in San Antonio, TX; Dallas, TX; Pittsburgh, PA; Minneapolis, MN; Boston, MA; Fayetteville, AR; Urbana, IL; Columbus, OH; Madison, WI; Arlington, VA; Marin County, CA; San Diego, CA; Oakland,

CA; Portland, OR; Somerville, MA; New York, NY; New Haven, CT; Evanston, IL; Grand Rapids, MI; and Cincinnati, OH.

The *Alternative Views* experience indicates that people are very receptive to information that is raw and real. On *Alternative Views* the accent is on reality, and the program is automatically provocative, disturbing, and sometimes even upsetting. Yet, as Congressman Henry Gonzalez (D-TX) said, after being interviewed: "Harry Truman used to say that people accused him of 'givin' em' hell' when he was only telling the truth. That is what you are doing on *Alternative Views*."

Frank Morrow is a producer of Alternative Views. He can be contracted at the following address: Alternative Information Network, P.O. Box 7279, Austin, TX 78713; (512) 474-2107.



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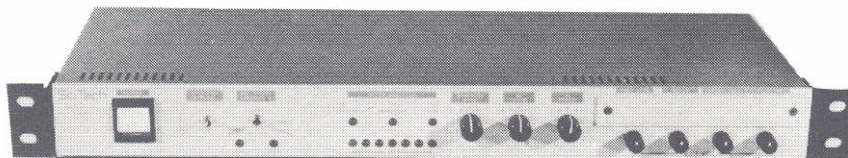
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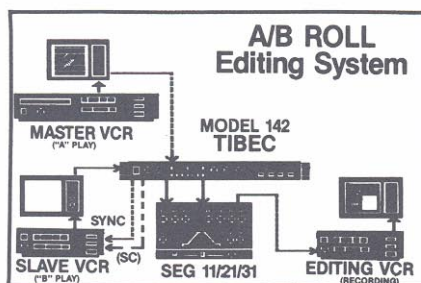
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Exchanging Tapes Creates New Communities

By Evelyn Pine

Political activists who view film and video as organizing tools have always paid close attention to distribution. Organizing means connecting individual concerns to a broader context, creating new networks of information and support which challenge and transform the status quo. For example, Bruce Springsteen's song, "My Hometown," is effective because the song places the individual experience of a factory shut-down into a wider political perspective.

If video is an organizing tool designed to educate and mobilize, it's crucial to get that tool into the hands of those who will use it effectively. Media distribution becomes a way to increase a constituency by delivering information unavailable in mainstream media.

Community producers, cable programming directors, telecommunications officers, nonprofit and religious programmers and others involved in cable have begun to understand what political producers have known for years. Distributing video is a way to share crucial information, to effectively use limited resources, and to expand

In 1982, the Foundation for Community Service Cable Television (FCSCT) began to explore the obstacles and issues surrounding the distribution of community programming in California. The result of this study is a computerized videotape exchange which we're implementing this year.

At the 1985 NFLCP Conference in Boston, NFLCP Board member Greg Epler Wood listed over 15 organizations interested in developing mechanisms for programming exchange. The diverse groups committed to the effective use of cable's community channels—colleges, libraries, cable systems and cities—have all determined that facilitating distribution is a priority.

Community programmers have always used tape bicycles to share programming among cable systems or access centers. Efforts like the NFLCP's Hometown USA Bicycle, have inspired other groups to consider distribution. American Television and Communications Corporation (ATC) has developed the Community Pro-

gramming Network, the only project which is delivering locally produced programming by satellite on a regular basis today. These moves toward wider distribution reflect the political and economic realities that community programmers face.

Franchises negotiated over the last six years have brought a wealth of channels, equipment, staff and other resources to some communities. Communities with older franchises have access to at least some channel time. Local institutions—schools, governments, hospitals, churches and community centers—have also made major investments in video equipment, training and staff.

However, programming a channel full time is expensive. Communities must be mobilized and educated about this new resource. Resources for cable are fragmented by franchise boundaries and geographical barriers. To justify the effort and expense, wider audiences must be found. Local groups need sources of low-cost programming and model programming to educate new users about cable's potential.

Underutilized channels are easy targets for cable companies and local governments that view access facilities as a financial drain. Citing financial hardship, many cable systems are now renegotiating franchises that require substantial support for access. With cuts in support from the operator, local groups look to franchise fees as a source of funding. Cities that originally negotiated for local channels may be unwilling to make access a budget priority over police protection and education.

This ambivalence on the part of the two key players—operators and city representatives—was institutionalized in national legislation. The Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 capped operator's financial responsibility for access. The legislation also allows cable operators to take over underutilized access channels for commercial programming, leaving it up to the city to develop guidelines for repossessing these channels.

All these factors force those who have a

stake in the development of community channels to rethink community programming distribution. Where distribution was previously seen as a threat to local efforts—exchanging tapes is now seen as a survival tactic. Programming from schools, social service organizations, independent producers, government and other sources is becoming a means of keeping channels lit while demonstrating cable's potential. A wider audience for community produced tapes can bring additional financial support, positive public relations and other benefits.

According to Maureen File, local programming director for Times Mirror in Orange County and a member of the FCSCT Tape Exchange Advisory Group, "the economics of video make it hard to program an entire channel. Until we can develop a consistent means of sharing information about local programming, we're stuck at a plateau."

In response to this void in California, the FCSCT developed a tape exchange project. Because we're mandated to encourage the use of California's community channels, setting up a meeting about the issue was a logical extension of our other activities. We sponsored a feasibility study on the potential for a statewide tape exchange.

A California-wide advisory group of community programmers, cable programming directors, educators, city telecommunications officers and religious programmers discovered that the needs of their own constituencies transcended franchise lines, geographical boundaries and economic barriers. Needs for programs directed at specific audiences or dealing with particular topics were met by a desire to distribute generic programs which were too expensive to replicate. There was concern that the excitement of discovering the fire of inspiration was being lost by continually reinventing the wheel.

The goals that emerged for the project are noteworthy because information and resource-sharing surfaced as critical factors in supporting local programming efforts. The goals are:

- 1) to encourage the full use of the access

- channels;
- 2) to identify low-cost, noncommercial programming for use on local cable channels;
- 3) to assist in program distribution over cable; and
- 4) to assess the status of local cable programming.

Bob Cremer, assistant director of Educational TV at the University of California, stated that the purpose of the exchange is "to establish an information pipeline to increase communication among producers of access programming and to enable these producers to share information and expertise more efficiently."

In our view of tape exchange models, including tape libraries, hard copy directories, local and regional exchanges, and computerized databases, the advisory group defined five key ingredients for a successful exchange:

1. serves a range of users from individual producers to major institutions;
2. encourages cable users to communicate with one another by eliminating the middleman function between user and provider;
3. emphasizes information sharing rather than the physical archiving of videotapes;
4. provides coordination and outreach to potential users;
5. assists other forms of networking and cooperation; and
6. is low cost. (Talks with funders convinced the advisors that the tape exchange would have to become self-sufficient to survive.)

The advisory group's work convinced the Foundation's board to funnel development funds to the project in 1984. Additional support was garnered the next year from the County Supervisors Association of California and the California Cable Television Association. In addition, the Peralta Community Colleges in Oakland invited the FCSCT to participate in a special computer purchase plan. Impressed by this diverse partnership, the Catholic Communications Campaign awarded the Foundation a major grant to pilot the project.

The tape exchange is a computerized catalogue of free or low-cost noncommercial programs available for use on local cable channels. Our hardware is an IBM-XT microcomputer and an AT&T PC 6300 with 640K and a 20 megabyte hard disk; the software we use is the exceptionally

user-friendly database management system of DBase III Plus.

To meet all the advisory group's goals, the exchange will be linked up with the Foundation's database on California cable channels to document existing distribution systems and programming resources. Initially, the Exchange will be accessed by phone or mail. The Tape Exchange will catalog model programming, generic programming for local wrap-arounds, videos for underserved audiences, stock footage and the like. Each tape entry contains detailed information about content, format and the producer. Products include individual referrals, per request printouts, specialized printouts such as lists of free programming or tapes in both Spanish and English, and catalogues.

Last year, the advisory group developed a strategy for outreach, created data collection forms, and designed the computer program. We tested their ideas on our grantees as a pilot study. We're now collecting information on available videotapes from organizations and individuals who would like to participate in our unique network. Because of our grant, all tape exchange services are being offered free of charge in 1986.

Our tape exchange will have significant impact on the use of the community channels in California. Because the tape exchange is built on information and resource sharing, it becomes a network for local producers to link with other communities.

The localism of access doesn't mean isolation. Distributing our work allows us to support each other in new ways. The communities implied in the term "community television" are not simply localities defined by geography, local government, or franchise boundaries. The communities embodied in the term community television include the entire range of shared interests that link people and organizations together. By sharing our programming, our idea, and expertise, we inspire others within our community of interest to pick up a camera and explore cable's potential to build new networks.

Evelyn Pine is on the staff of the Foundation For Community Service Cable Television. She can be contacted at the following address: FCSCT, 5010 Geary Blvd., Suite 3, San Francisco, CA 94118; (415) 287-0200.

Access: A Vast, Untapped Resource

(Continued from page 12)

encourage any public access organization interested in doing a similar program to keep in mind one important principle: if a mistake is made, keep going. If the telephone doesn't work, have written or live questions supplied by the audience; if the microphone goes dead, it can be replaced on the air; and if the camera pans the ceiling, pan down and keep going. This is community television and I have found that no matter what happens, people watching at home, or in the audience, are able to communicate with me, and that's the important thing.

Our first meeting was cablecast on the public access channel in Los Alamos, and it was simulcast on the local radio station. I learned a great deal from this first meeting. I learned that cable is not a cosmic medium, and that political cablecasting works best when it focuses on the local concerns of the audience. I made this discovery from the questions I was asked by viewers at home. I noticed that their questions focused on the local impact of national issues.

In subsequent meetings, I was able to use themes to elicit questions. For example, I would take the issue of trade and the role of the United States in a world economy, and apply it to a local situation. Questions from the audience and viewers would follow these themes, but of course I received plenty of questions on other issues.

Local political cablecasting is a vast, untapped resource. It has the unique ability to link the community with its public officials in a way that no other medium can. Public access can provide a forum for exchange of information and debate. It can become a valuable vehicle for disseminating information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. And it gives public officials a unique opportunity to provide a complete, unedited presentation of their views to their constituents.

I look forward to doing these town meetings. Each one has been an experience that has brought me closer to those who elected me.

Jeff Bingaman is a U.S. Senator from New Mexico. For more information, contact Gary Tydings, c/o Senator Bingaman, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510; (202) 224-5521.

Deep Dish TV—More Than Pie In The Sky

By Caryn Rogoff

On April 16, the DEEP DISH TV Network will begin transmitting a 10-week series via satellite, featuring excerpts of public access productions from across the country. The feed is being offered free to cable stations nationwide. Each hour-long program will focus on a different social issue of national concern. The line-up will begin with a show on public access and freedom of speech, and then follow with shows on labor, youth and education, housing, racism, the military, local perspectives on Central America, the farming crisis, media by women, and popular culture.

The series will be beamed from the Galaxy I satellite, transponder 22, and will be available to anyone with a receiving dish—reaching a potential audience of over 31 million cable subscribers, and over one million home dish owners.

The series is being organized by Paper Tiger Television, a collective of media producers and activists who have had a regular program on Manhattan Cable and Group W Cable in New York City since 1981.

The idea of using satellite distribution for access programming evolved from discussions between Paper Tiger and other like minded groups who wanted to share programming, but were frustrated by limitations of traditional "bicycling" methods. We knew there were many activist producers making shows on a multitude of social issues. And many of the shows were of interest beyond the local geographical communities they were produced in. As George Stoney pointed out, "Access is aimed at functioning on a community level, but in this culture, our sense of community is not limited to geographical areas. The idea of community also extends into broader areas of interest."

There were informal exchanges between groups such as the Somerville Producers Group in Somerville, MA, *Alternative Views* in Austin, TX, the *Mill Hunk Story Hour* in Pittsburgh, PA, and XChange-TV in New York City. The logistics made it difficult to build a sustaining network. However, we saw satellite distribution as a

way to build that network, and to build and reach larger audiences for this type of programming.

At the same time, groups like Public Interest Video Network (PIVN) in Washington, DC were already renting satellite time to distribute live and taped programming with national organizations such as the Union of Concerned Scientists and National Resources Defense Council. At an hourly rate of less than \$500/hour, satellite distribution no longer seemed like something only possible for media conglomerates and the military.

Working with PIVN director Arlen Slobodow, we developed a proposal for a series which would highlight the common-

ality of community concerns nationwide, while involving as many producers as possible and preserving regional diversity. In the summer of 1985 we were awarded a grant from the Massachusetts Council for the Arts and Humanities through the Boston Film/Video Foundation. Additional support came from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Benton Foundation. In the fall of 1985, DEEP DISH TV was born.

Over the past several years, Paper Tiger collected a list of over 150 public access programmers and producers who were interested in airing and producing alternative programming. In November, a call

(Continued on page 38)



Members of the Paper Tiger crew prepare for DEEP DISH TV.

PUBLIC POLICY

Censorship: Can You, Should You, Would You

This is the second in a three-part series of roundtable discussions with Sue Miller Buske, executive director of NFLCP; Joseph Van Eaton, an attorney with the law firm of Spiegel and McDiarmid; Michael Meyerson, a law professor at the University of Baltimore; and W. Randolph Young, an attorney with the law firm of Miller and Young. They spoke with CTR editor Paul D'Ari.

This session addressed practical First Amendment issues that affect public access centers. They discussed the conditions, if any, under which an access organization may restrict obscene, libelous, and other forms of unprotected speech. There was also some discussion on whether it is permissible for an access center to ban unprotected speech, and whether an access center is legally liable for cablecasting such programming. The roundtable also addressed issues that may arise if access centers restrict religious programming or programming by political candidates.

The next issue of CTR will feature a roundtable discussion on franchise fees and access funding.

CTR: We all know that public access centers do not operate on an absolute first come, first served basis. Access programmers make scheduling decisions and some access centers even give preferential treatment to organizations, as opposed to individuals. Their decisions are usually rea-

sonable, but do you think there are First Amendment issues here?

Meyerson: The key is to use content neutral regulations. For example, to prevent monopolization by one group, you can limit the number of times any member from any given group can speak. And I don't think there is anything constitutionally suspect about saying that series programs will be shown, let's say, between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., or that individual programs will be shown between 9:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. I think that the more the regulation has nothing to do with the content and does not raise the risk of a penalization for either content, subject matter, or personal dislike of the speaker—the more likely all these rules will be upheld.

CTR: What if a producer wants to cablecast a program, and the programming manager thinks that it is for an adult audience? Are there any First Amendment issues involved if the manager restricts it to a late night showing?

Meyerson: The more you have preordained standards, the easier it would be for the organization to make that sort of choice. For example, no nudity before 10:00 at night. That's fine. But if you do it, the more absolute the discretion you have, the more danger there will be. So I would argue that if you want to retain the

right to limit, let's say, profanity and nudity, you should develop general rules at the outset, which say, perhaps, that we reserve the right to put on such programming after 10:00 p.m. I think that's much safer than to say, on a case-by-case basis, that this is a touchy area, and we don't want it.

Young: We could probably talk for two hours on this subject. It's a very fascinating area, and it has all sorts of implications and practical ramifications. I think it would be worthwhile for any local access group to look at the FCC Fairness Doctrine, equal time for political candidates rules, and personal attack rules, and see if those concepts have any potential for application on the local level. From a practical standpoint, what you've got is a little broadcast system that is open to the public, and you've got the same potential problems as with over the air broadcasting. If you tend to follow the federal standard, I think you're less likely to run into trouble in the courts.

Van Eaton: This is interesting. I don't know whether I am reading both of you right, but it seems to me that the underlying question here is, are non-profit organizations subject to restrictions under the First Amendment? Since they are neither a government nor a cable operator, how do non-profits relate to the First Amendment? I guess I would argue that



they are subject to restrictions under the First Amendment.

CTR: What about access centers run by cable companies?

Van Eaton: The Cable Act prohibits cable operators from censoring access, and I think this ends up having the same effect.

CTR: Perhaps it would be appropriate to discuss a case in which an access producer has been either directly or indirectly censored by an access center.

Buske: I received a call recently from a person who is doing a show, and is being prevented from using the equipment at an access facility. Apparently, the restriction is not due to a violation of any rules. This individual appears to be blocked from using facilities through procedures on the books, because the access center doesn't like her program. The access center said this person violated a rule, but when she went to the cable commission, the commission looked at the rules and said this person has not violated any rules. After that, every time she called to reserve equipment, she was told the equipment was broken down. Yet, other people were using the equipment, so the equipment was obviously operating.

This kind of reality occasionally rears its ugly head at us. We need to have rules, and if somebody violates the rules, breaks a piece of equipment, or is clearly negligent—we may need to penalize that individual. However, these rules are sometimes being bent because of personalities and program content.

Young: The problem is to prove censorship. If a person feels like he or she is being discriminated against—indirectly or insidiously—keep a record of what happens. If this record demonstrates a repetitive course of conduct which is fairly clear, it could provide a strong factual basis for a formal complaint.

Meyerson: What they can do is proceed along the same lines as complainants in housing discrimination cases. Have other individuals call before and after the complainant calls, and have them ask about the equipment as well. And if everyone else gets the equipment, then it make the argument stronger. There is a factual issue here, so people have to be very careful about proving the facts.

CTR: Can an access center censor obscene, libelous, or other programming that is unprotected by the First Amendment?

Meyerson: Neither a cable company nor a city may censor unprotected speech. If a city doesn't like a program, or if it thinks it is obscene or libelous, there are formalized procedures the U.S. Supreme Court has laid out for dealing with it. They must go to court and prove that the speech is obscene, libelous, or in other ways unprotected. They don't have the right to say, we don't like your program, and you can't go on.

With respect to the cable operator, I would like to point out that the Cable Act says the cable operator has no editorial control, and the cable operator cannot be liable for obscene programming. Since they are not liable for it, cable operators are not permitted to control, pre-screen, or restrain unprotected programming. This is in the House Report. The House Report says that the reason the cable operator is not liable for any programming over the access channels is because the Cable Communication Policy Act of 1984 prohibits operators from having editorial control over any of these channels.

CTR: What about a non-profit access center?

Meyerson: I would say that if it is either a governmental or a quasi-governmental organization, the only way they can censor is by going to court to get a judicial determination first. It is not in their power to determine what is unprotected speech.

CTR: If a non-profit access center cannot censor, does that mean they are not liable, if unprotected speech is cablecast?

Meyerson: That's a different issue. That's a trickier question.

Van Eaton: That's right. It is more complicated. Under the cable act, operators are not liable for programming cablecast on access channels. However, it is not clear whether a non-profit access corporation would be regarded in the same light. In fact, if you go to the definition in the cable act, I would say the chances are that public access corporations would not be the same as a cable operator in this context.

Young: There are two different issues here that should be separated. You've got a question of prior restraint, and you've got a question of liability.

Let's say an access producer produced a tape making serious charges against the mayor, which are clearly false and libelous. You can't impose prior restraint on

this speech. The access center should let the producer know that he or she is potentially liable for such speech, but the access center cannot censor it. And the access center would not be liable in a situation like this. I would say as a general rule, if you have no editorial rights or legal right of censorship, it is very difficult to see a situation in which you would be liable.

However, there are exceptions. Let's say somebody comes into an access center and informs the programming manager that he or she has a tape that shows children in compromising positions. If the staff of the access center knows about the program content, if it is clearly obscene, and if the access center allows it to be cablecast—the center may be liable.

Meyerson: I don't agree. I believe very strongly that it's just none of the access center's business. They are not in the business of having editorial control. The only thing they can do is go to court. They cannot play the role of the editor. And if they do not play the role of the editor, they are not liable.

Young: I agree with you as a general proposition. However, there may be extreme cases in which an access center is aware of blatant obscenity. What I would recommend is a procedure to handle speech which is clearly unprotected. In that case, I think you have an obligation to say no. But you also have an obligation to tell the producer why you think this is the case, he or she can go to court or seek other review that may be available. Now this is only in an extreme case, so I think we disagree only on the absolute extremes.

Van Eaton: I believe the editorial role of an access center must be limited to the extreme cases because the more the access center plays the role of the editor, the more the access center has to be the editor of all the programming, in order to avoid liability.

Meyerson: That's a very good point. If they edit a little, then, by definition, they have editorial control. And if they have editorial control, they are liable. In the extreme cases, the First Amendment is very messy. I have no doubt about that. But I'm arguing that that's the way it's got to be.

Young: All I'm saying is, if in the normal course of operating, you become aware that there is something that is clearly not protected, and you allow it to go on, I think there is an element of liability. It's a very difficult area, and it depends completely on the facts. However, I can

imagine a lot of extreme examples that are fairly clear.

In my view, the real problem is in the gray area. And my basic thought would be: if you don't know about a program that is clearly libelous before it is cablecast, you can't be held liable. But if you know something is going to be said that is clearly libelous, then I think the access center may be liable.

Meyerson: I don't think of liability in terms of prior knowledge. I think of it in terms of one's ability to control content. And if you have the ability to control content, then you are liable. If you are an access organization with strict rules saying no editorial control, you lack the ability to stop the programming. And that's how I would say the issue would be determined. If you don't have the ability to actually stop a program, how could you be liable? I would say that the way to safeguard an access center is to have rules that deny them editorial control.

Van Eaton: Which means you would advise access corporations to drop all rules restricting obscene programming.

Meyerson: I think they can have all access producers sign a contract pledging that they will not produce an obscene program for access.

Young: What you're doing is shifting potential liability from the person who implements the rules to whoever made those rules.

CTR: Many access channels have a lot of religious programs. And in some cases it affects the identity of the channel. In response to this reality, some access centers have put a ceiling on the amount of religious programming, and in some places the amount of political programming. I know one access center that allows only 30 percent political programming and 30 percent religious programming on the channel per week. Is this a First Amendment violation?

Meyerson: Outrageous! For an access center to say political speech is bad and that it needs to be limited, runs contrary to any free speech principle in a democratic society. The Supreme Court has said that political speech is at the highest, not the lowest rung of speech. I think religious speech also must be treated carefully because of constitutional protection for religion. I don't think you can say that religious speech is bad. If you want to maximize the

number of different speakers or topics, the way to do it is with content neutral regulations. For example, you can say that only one member from a particular organization can use the channel each day or each week, and there is a one-hour time limit.

Young: I basically agree. But I think you've got to be extremely careful. There's a problem in the real world that affects diversity of programming. However, I agree that the way you go is to limit the time of an individual or an organization, so that others can use the channel.

I think there may be ways of developing rules for political candidates. One way is to ban them all. I think that is feasible. I think that's constitutional. But once you let one in, I think you've got a problem. At that point, you've got to let others in. I think this is exactly what broadcasters do today. I'm using broadcasting as a model, because broadcasters don't have to accept any political candidates programming. They don't have to have any debates. And I don't see why that approach is not just as constitutionally valid for access as it is for broadcasting. But I must say that I'm giving you an initial reaction, not an opinion based on firm research.

Van Eaton: If you ban political candidates, but allow debate on political issues, where are you going to draw the line? I don't see how you can enforce a ban on political candidates programming. We also have Supreme Court cases in which attempts to ban candidates from newspapers and other publications the day before an election, in order to prevent electioneering, have been struck down.

Meyerson: I believe there is absolutely no valid governmental interest in keeping political speech off—no valid governmental interest whatsoever.

Buske: I think there is a difference between banning political speech and restricting political speech. Restrictions are often adopted in order to ensure a fair election process. Perhaps you can limit access to candidates at 15 minutes a week, and then have formal debates. It seems to me that is a content neutral rule.

Meyerson: I don't see how you can justify treating politicians any differently than you would other speakers. If you want rules against monopolization, that's fine, but don't limit the debate.

If time is available, you can't say no to a speaker, because you think it changes

the character of the channel. Who's deciding what the character of the channel is? Is it really up to a public access organization to say what the character of the channel should be?

Buske: Let's talk about religion for a moment. A number of communities are flooded with religious programming. In many cases, this programming is from evangelistic groups who are not based in the community. They are shipping tapes into the community. They have the potential of dominating the time on that channel. You may suddenly have a channel that is dominated by religious programming being shipped in from outside the community.

Van Eaton: Why do you care whether it is an evangelistic religious program or any other kind of program? What if NFLCP's Hometown USA programming is being thrust into a community and dominating a channel?

Buske: I am just mentioning a specific problem that people have to deal with.

Van Eaton: Is it a problem because the programming is religious, or because it comes from outside the community?

Buske: Probably both.

Meyerson: Well, one thing the government can deal with, and the other thing it can't. I think Joe is absolutely right. You have to identify the problem. The problem cannot be that an access organizer doesn't like all these religious groups. What an access center can do is make a regulation stating that 80 percent of all programming must be from within the community. If your problem is monopolization, make a rule stating that no one from a particular organization can speak more than once a week. These are permissible governmental interests—local programming and diversity. However, it is an impermissible governmental interest to keep religion out. And the fact that an access organizer may dislike religion is an improper motive, and he or she should not be acting on that basis.

Buske: I agree with you. I might add that access groups can also address this problem by going out into their community to bring in other speakers. We can realize diversity through community organizing—by actively encouraging participation from a wide range of citizens and organizations.

Protecting The Diversity

By Bob Devine

The notion of public access to cable communications is derived from the First Amendment. Providing a means for citizens to speak and be "heard" is grounded in the utilitarian ideal of a "marketplace of ideas," and the strength of our democracy depends on it. In an era in which the "marketplace" is dominated by electronic communications, the social invention of cable protects this marketplace notion by providing fair access for all to an arena of electronic discourse.

The issues involved in providing "fair access for all" is problematic. Providing training, facilities and channel time on a "first-come, first-served" basis is a standard mandate for access. This provision has the dual purpose of providing protection for the unrestrained and uncensored use of such license to speak, while at the same time defining a neutral and non-editorial role for those providing access. While the provision is clearly intended to protect the openness and accessibility of the marketplace, this first-come, first-served mandate is seldom defined or articulated in a policy framework.

With limited facilities, equipment and channel space, the problem becomes one of protecting the diversity of voices in the marketplace (which was the original goal of access). Given the first-come, first-served mandate, what protections are there for the full range of disenfranchised populations, viewpoints, groups and voices? What is to prevent a select few viewpoints, groups or even individuals from dominating the resources of access? Remembering that the First Amendment is a negative injunction, how can access be structured and developed in such a way as to maintain a true and diverse marketplace and at the same time avoid the issues of censorship and control that come from placing limitations on particular types of programs, producers of programs or viewpoints?

The Milwaukee Access Telecommunications Authority (the non-profit access corporation in the city of Milwaukee) has attempted to address these problems by developing policies for training, equipment use, and use of channel time. The

goals of MATA include maximizing the use of resources dedicated to access, providing fair access to all, and ensuring diversity of programming. To meet these goals, MATA's board attempted to minimize discretionary and judgment call limitations by implementing across-the-board limitations which seemed to serve the ends of the stated goals.

Access To Training

While allowing for first-come, first-served entry into the training programs offered in Milwaukee, MATA developed a balancing policy with regard to the outreach efforts of the organization. MATA's outreach strategy is to ensure fair use by all, maximize community utilization of the resources, and develop the broadest possible diversity of use. If MATA facilities and programming seem to be headed in a monolithic direction, or become dominated by a particular viewpoint or segment of the population, the board has the levers to direct the organization, through outreach, to stimulate use of the resources by those segments of the population, those groups, or those viewpoints, that have not been adequately represented.

MATA has taken this policy framework a step further in developing an aggressive outreach program aimed at addressing community concerns which might otherwise take a great deal of time to surface in access programming. We are developing a series of "critical issues" forums on parenting, neighborhood development, teen sexuality education, housing, health, environmental concerns and economic development. The programming is being developed by concerned citizens and professionals in these fields. MATA is bringing together concerned citizens and representatives from relevant organizations to participate in the production of these forums. The initiative taken by MATA as the access provider has stimulated the utilization of the available training and resources. While MATA does not produce the programming, the critical issues forums pose the questions: "What sort of programming *should* be on the access channels?" and, "Who is not being represented?"

Access To Equipment and Facilities

Policies for equipment and facility use require reconciliation of the first-come, first-served mandate, with the goal of ensuring diversity. The limitations we imposed were aimed at preventing domination of resources by any group, individual or viewpoint.

Our basic limitation involves a "rolling window of opportunity" for equipment scheduling. The latest a producer can reserve equipment is 7 days in advance (to allow enough time to make sure of batteries, tape, staff coverage, etc.) and the earliest a producer can reserve equipment is 30 days in advance. This means that even if the access equipment were completely "booked" for the next 30 days as of today, tomorrow a new opportunity opens up for all facilities. This provision limits the amount of "future monopolization" that is possible, and allows the recently certified producer to have the same chance that veteran producers have at scheduling available resources.

Additional limitations have to do with the number of reservations of equipment or facilities possible. Each producer, organization or project is allowed only one reservation of any kind at one time. When the reserved use of equipment or facilities is completed, an additional reservation can be made. While MATA will negotiate a "series contract" for thirteen units of production time, post-production time, and channel playback time for regular programming stability, such series programs are scrutinized at the end of ten cablecast units with regard to (a) the consistent delivery of quality programming; (b) the requests for production or post-production equipment or channel time which had to be refused because of the series commitment; and (c) the diversity of the overall program schedule and the place of the series within that schedule. The one-at-a-time reservation policy, and the series review are both aimed at providing fair access to all by limiting the extent to which a single focus or activity can dominate the facilities.

Similarly, there are limitations on the

time allotted to each reservation. A producer may use portable field production equipment for a maximum of 24 hours, an editor for a maximum of four hours, and the production studio for a maximum of four hours. This policy ensures that seven different producers will have access to a portable unit during each week; that 10-14 producers will have access to an editor during each week; and that 10-14 production crews will have access to a production studio during each week.

Access To Channel Space

This is the most difficult arena in which to guarantee both diversity of programming and first-come, first-served access. The complexities of channel scheduling and audience building have to be a part of the balance. First-come, first-served requests for channel time are honored by MATA within the parameters of (a) overall program composition and flow, (b) considerations of viewership and audience-building; (c) constraints on schedule building that have to do with our unique traffic system; and (d) representative diversity of programming. This policy gives a traffic operator the latitude to work through the mechanics of program scheduling and the mandate to have the schedule reflect as much diversity as is possible. Twelve comedy programs in the same week may be intolerable; it may be necessary to schedule such a concentration over two or three months in order to maintain a balance of diversity in programming. A plethora of religious programming could imbalance the schedule; it may be necessary to allot certain time blocks or encourage an ecumenical programming umbrella. A glut of music videos might similarly dominate program scheduling, and it may be necessary to spread such programming over time in order to maintain a diverse program flow. It should be understood, however, that it is not discretionary to a traffic operator to schedule or disallow scheduling of programs based on personal preference.

An additional limitation is that of time. Scheduling a program for more than 60 minutes on a MATA channel requires a special request, indicating the nature of the program and the rationale for the extended time requirement. Programs longer than 60 minutes are taking time from other potential producers and dominating the channels. On the short end, programs of any length shorter than 60 minutes are permitted; MATA packages the shorter

pieces into a format and presents them as a full program of video shorts.

An inescapable issue in access programming is how to handle programming originating either outside of the access facilities or outside of the municipality in which the access operates (or both). To protect the access resources of Milwaukee, outside programming is allowed for cablecast only within certain constraints: (1) in all cases, residents of Milwaukee have priority preemption of MATA channel time; (2) at no time can programming produced by non-residents of the city of Milwaukee comprise more than 25% of the total program time scheduled during a month; and (3) all programming must comply with the programming rules and policies of the city of Milwaukee and MATA. Again, the effort represented here is to provide a policy infrastructure which limits the ability of an organization, group or individual to absorb or dominate the resources designated by the franchise to be for local use.

* * * * *

The implementation of the first-come, first-served mandate has required the development of policies aimed at preserving the thrust and potential of access by protecting the diversity that the design of access was intended to enfranchise. In the arena of training, this involved balancing first-come, first-served access with aggressive outreach to stimulate and develop utilization of the opportunities that access offers. In the arena of equipment and facility use, it involved limiting the time frame, number and duration of reservations allowed to any individual, group, or project. In the arena of channel use, it meant providing limitations on the amount of channel space available and the eligibility for use of the channel space, as well as providing a policy mandate for programming to reflect the diversity of the community. In all of these areas of policy formulation, the over-reaching concerns were with providing fair first-come, first-served access in a manner which maximizes the use of access' scarce resources while at the same time protecting the diversity of use.

The promise of access is that it can be what the community *wants it to be*. The difficulty is in structuring it in such a way that it can fulfill that promise.

Bob Devine is executive director of the Milwaukee Access Telecommunications Authority. He can be contacted at MATA, 606 E. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53202; (414) 278-8833.

A Valuable Link in Constitutional Communications

(Continued from page 13)

Still, we are finding that those dedicated viewers are making the show worthwhile. Although we have no empirical measurement of *Washington Report's* audience, we have a sense of its effect. Sometimes we hear from a constituent who mentions the program. More frequently, someone contacts us with a question or comment about something we said which could only have been picked up from one of the shows. As long as the show enhances constituents' knowledge and involvement in the political process, the time and energy are worthwhile.

The show offers an added dimension for me as a member of the House Telecommunications Subcommittee. The entire exercise is an opportunity to more closely experience the practical, routine aspects of a cable operator's life. This experience results in a little better insight when dealing with some of the more esoteric aspects of cable policy and legislation.

Tom Tauke is a U.S. Congressman from Iowa. For more information, contact: Randy Bengfort, c/o Congressman Tauke, 2244 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515; (202) 225-2911.

Access Offers a Rare Opportunity

(Continued from page 14)

under-viewed. Public access advocates respond that local governments and the cable company have not provided adequate funding support for audience development and greater utilization of the channels. In any case, there is a clear message for all of us who care about continued access to cable television.

Too few people understand the importance of a local cable programming. We must increase public awareness of the opportunities presented by local cable channels, so that more elected officials, schools, nonprofit organizations, and community producers use this service. This is our challenge, and we must meet it at once.

Barbara Boxes is a U.S. Congresswoman from California. For more information, contact: Loretta Robinson, c/o Congresswoman Barbara Boxer, 315 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.

THE COMMUNITY VIDEOT

By Dave Bloch

Let's talk tape this time! Isn't it amazing how much money we pour into equipment to make good-looking videotape programs, and how little attention we give to the care of our tape? Especially when videocassettes ask so little of us.

I won't go into a lot of detail, because tape manufacturers give you a complete list of dos and don'ts on the back of the label that comes with every Beta or VHS tape you buy. (Have you ever read it?) I highly recommend you stick a copy of one of these labels up in your tape cabinet, or even copy them and hand them out to your access users.

The basics of tape care are these:

- 1) Store the tape in its box, fully rewound. That keeps dust from getting on the tape, which will scratch the emulsion and clog your precious VCR's heads.
- 2) Keep the tape away from heat and magnetic fields. That means don't put it on top of the TV! TV sets have powerful magnetic fields running all over the place inside them, which will gradually begin to affect the signal which you have so carefully recorded on your tape. And they get warm, too.
- 3) Store tape standing up on end—not lying down. Although a reel of tape (even inside a cassette) looks solid, remember it is actually just several hundred extremely thin, fragile layers.
If stored flat, the edges of the layers of tape will gradually begin to bend over, ruining your recording. I know some tape librarians who even periodically "rotate" their tapes—turning them upside-down to minimize stretching. It seems to be a good idea for fine wine, so why not?
- 4) If you ship tape, *never* use those thick envelopes padded with shredded newspaper! That stuff works its way right down into the cassette, inviting all kinds of trouble for the recipient.

Use an envelope padded with bubble plastic, or ship it in a box.

Rejuvenating Old Tape

I have to pass this tip on to you. It comes from a letter printed in *A/V Video* magazine (I have not tried it myself). If you have an old one-half-inch reel videotape that just won't play anymore, and you want to make a copy for your library, try this.

First, bake the reel of tape in a 150-degree warming oven (try your friendly school cafeteria) for about 5 minutes. Do not bake.

Then, place the reel on your VTR, and thread the tape *directly* onto a take-up reel *without* passing through the normal thread path. Fast forward the tape all the way through, and rewind it all the way back.

Repeat this process three or four times, then thread the tape up, plug the VTR into a second recorder, and make your copy.

I know, it sounds crazy to me, too. But the man says it really works. Please, don't experiment with that 1963 Golden Vidicon Award winner you've been saving, and let me know what happens.

An Ultra-Directional Microphone

At one time, Sony manufactured an inexpensive parabolic dish, which would transform any miserable hand microphone into a long-range directional mic. Alas, this wonderful device is no longer in production, but the technique is still very sound. All you have to do is find a parabolic dish of a convenient size (eighteen inches or so across), mount a gooseneck near the edge, and bolt some handles to the back.

I have two suggestions on sources for the dish. A child's plastic "snow saucer" is a good approximation to a parabolic shape, and is very cheap and easy to find (at least, in cold climates during the winter).

The second possibility is an actual

microwave dish, which you can pick up at a ham radio swap-n-shop, or even in your cable company's junk pile. The microwave dish is, of course, a perfect parabola and extremely efficient. One of our access producers recently bought one for fifteen dollars—it picks up whispers from forty feet away with a common hand microphone mounted on it.

An operating tip: be sure the dish-holder is wearing headphones connected to your VCR, so he/she can aim the dish accurately.

Dave Bloch is local programming director at Davis Community Cable Cooperative. He can be contacted at the following address: Davis Community Cable Cooperative, 1605 2nd Street, Davis, CA 95616; (916) 757-2419.

Access Restrictions For Candidates Prevent Electioneering

(Continued from page 8)

public service and therefore, were not accepted.

It is important to have guidelines and rules. Keep records of all requests and correspondence. L.O. operations should develop rate cards for "air" time or studio use. You may never need them but as cablesystems offer elected officials and candidates a new way to "speak" to the electorate, situations are sure to arise.

Len Tammaro is currently the program director for American Cablesystems in Arlington, Massachusetts. He can be contacted at the following address: Arlington Cablesystems, 81 Mystic Street, Arlington, MA 02174; (617) 643-5252.

Classified Ads

Public Access Facilitator

Community Access center providing public, educational, and governmental access to the citizens of a medium-sized city seeking experienced public access facilitator to train, assist, and schedule the public in the planning and production of their programs. Requires an understanding of $\frac{3}{4}$ " video technology; knowledge of studio, ENG and EFP production; experience conducting trainings and workshops; the ability to work and communicate effectively with a diverse range of people. Send resume and salary history to:

Access Staff Search
Community Access Television
107 N. 5th Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48107

Video/Film

Faculty to teach video production in an interdisciplinary context. Basic requirements include: 1) developed technical skills; 2) ability to apply these skills to a variety of disciplines; 3) experience with interdisciplinary applications of media; 4) familiarity with contemporary image-making techniques; 5) ability to supervise advanced student projects in 16mm production; 6) ability to work with minority student producers in community-based projects. Preference for candidates who work with artistic applications of the moving image rather than purely commercial ones. M.A. or M.F.A. required; Ph.D. preferred. Must present evidence of on-going personal work in video or film.

Closing Date: May 5 1985.

To apply, send resume, two letters of recommendation from colleagues and two letters from students, and any standardized teaching evaluation forms available plus a statement of education philosophy and a syllabus exhibiting your approach to teaching to:

Dean Barbara Leigh Smith
The Evergreen State College
Olympia, WA 98505

L.O. Programming Director

American Cablesystems of Cambridge seeks an L.O. program director. Responsibilities to include managing staff of four and program development for two L.O. channels. Successful candidate must have two to three years experience in management of L.O. facilities. Technical and organizational skills are also required. Send resume to:

Edward G. Holleran, Jr.
General Manager
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The Mid-Peninsula Access Corporation, Palo Alto, California is looking for a general manager. Position available: September-October, 1986. Interviews in July, 1986. Send resumes to:

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Palo Alto, CA 94304-9991

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Executive Director

Austin Community Television (ACTV) is accepting applications for the position of general manager. Responsibilities involve overall management of a major contract with the city of Austin, TX to provide community access services. Duties include: planning and administration of access center operations, facilities and services; staff supervision, including hiring and dismissals; preparation of program reports and budgeting; and generally representing the organization, with accountability to the ACTV Board of Directors for all activities. Salary: \$25,000 to \$32,000. Two-year contract (minimum) required. Position to be filled by May 1.

To apply, send a resume, two letters of reference and a cover letter summarizing administrative and management experience, familiarity with community access television and video production to:

Melissa Hield
President
Austin Community Television
P.O. Box 1076
Austin, TX 78767

Executive Director

Cincinnati Cable Access Corporation is seeking an executive director. Strong background in access management, policy and programming necessary. Please submit resume and salary history in confidence to:

Search Committee
CCAC
2944 Colerain Ave.
Cincinnati, OH 45225
Deadline: April 22, 1986

Elected Officials and Government Access

(Continued from page 16)

of appearances that elected officials may make on their channels. The most restrictive ones prohibit any appearances. However, most of the centers allow their elected officials to participate in non-partisan discussions on government channels, provided they refrain from endorsing candidates or ballot measures. A good example is a series on the government access channel in Glendale, AZ, entitled *On the Spot with the Mayor*. According to Citable Video Production Specialist Matthew Kobylinski, *On the Spot With The Mayor* "addresses current issues in the community. . . . The Mayor comes up with his own ideas, and hosts the program." In Madison, WI, the city channel produced a program entitled *District Reports* and on that show, each city alderman had a monthly ten-minute opportunity to produce their own program. Elected officials who participate in these programs feel that they are an excellent vehicle for staying in touch with their constituents.

Another important issue to consider is how to address controversial issues. If, for example, an elected official presents an opinion on a city-sponsored talk program, should the channel seek the opinion of an individual from the community to present his or her opposing viewpoint? Or does the manager recommend that the challenger use the public access channel for a rebuttal? This latter action is the most prevalent among government access centers, and appears generally to meet the needs of the individuals who wish to respond. However, what about communities with little or no public access?

There are no easy answers to these questions. However, in general, the best solution is to create impartially moderated programs which allow for open discussions so that diverse views on important issues can be expressed.

Andy Beecher is programming director of the Metropolitan Area Communications Commission in Beaverton, OR. He writes "Government Access Corner" in every issue of CTR. He can be contacted at the following address: MACC, 12655, S.W. Center Street, #390, Beaverton, OR 97005; (503) 641-0218.

Access Provides a Forum for Discussions on National Issues

(Continued from page 23)

and public television stations. The desire to empower people, and the willingness to run the risk of home viewer calls and talking heads, is much stronger in the access community. In Reading and Pocatello, the emphasis is on content, not glitter. Cable access organizations instinctively understand what the NIF is about, and understand their role in improving the community learning process. The result is not the breezy entertainment that is said to be "good television," but it is without question "good community."

What television does best is to provide information and create an appetite for the NIF approach. The BCTV experiment, with study circles, appears to hold the best hope for an important new model of community learning. The televised forums (with the video starter tapes providing essential background information) lays out the basic choices, and gives viewers and participants the sense that what they have to say on these matters of national concern is important. With this background, small group sessions in schools and senior centers, homes and churches, will give people a real chance to talk through the issues. Representatives from the small groups can then appear on future cablecast forums to share opinions and search for common ground.

In his keynote address at the NFLCP National Convention in Boston last summer, David Mathews, President of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, urged the cable access community to help restore the old American town meeting through a partnership with the National Issues Forum. Mathews challenged the group to help revitalize this important form of community learning: "It is very important for you not to underestimate your power. The people who have moved human history have been the people who have commanded public power. That's your power and that's why all of us are very interested in what you do with it."

Bruce Adams is an Associate of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. To learn more about the National Issues Forum or to find out if there is an NIF organization in your city, you can contact him at: 7211 Exeter Road, Bethesda, MD 20814; (301) 652-4019.

Deep Dish TV—More Than Pie in the Sky

(Continued from page 30)

for videotapes was sent to members of NFLCP, the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers (NAMAC), and our own mailing list. By February, we received tape descriptions and enthusiastic responses from approximately 300 producers from all regions of the country. Paper Tiger formed 10 production teams—one for each show, and each group contacted producers of tapes they felt were appropriate for the shows. During April and May the production teams will edit together segments of the tapes and add beginnings, endings, and bridges between segments.

The series will begin with a program examining public access on cable television. Besides introducing viewers to the concept of access, this particular program will present examples of access programming, document political and economic struggles that numerous access centers have faced in recent years, and showcase several successful access operations. We are encouraging local producers and programmers to use the series to focus attention on the importance of access in their communities.

Publicity is a primary focus of the project. Over 5,000 packets of publicity material were sent to cable operators, access centers, national and regional press, alternative publications, and national organizations working on the issues featured in the shows. But the success of the network and local publicity will largely depend on the efforts of local producers, programmers and activists. It will be their role to promote the series and ensure that cable operators record the satellite feed for local cablecast.

DEEP DISH TV is an experiment. As a pilot for a cooperative approach to satellite distribution of social issues programming, this series will help identify the advantages and disadvantages of this method of distribution. And during the next few years, producers of social and political issues programming will be able to use it as a model for developing wider distribution of their programming.

Caryn Rogoff is a principal organizer of DEEP DISH TV. For more information, contact DEEP DISH TV, 165 W. 91st Street, New York, NY 10024; (212) 420-9045.

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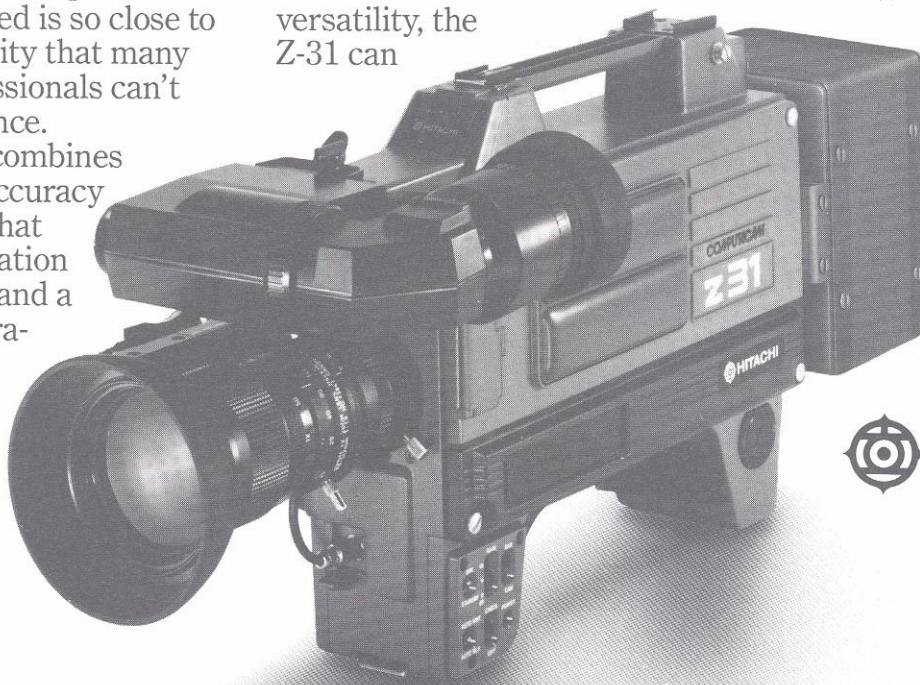
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